

# SEPTEMBER DAYS ON NANTUCKET

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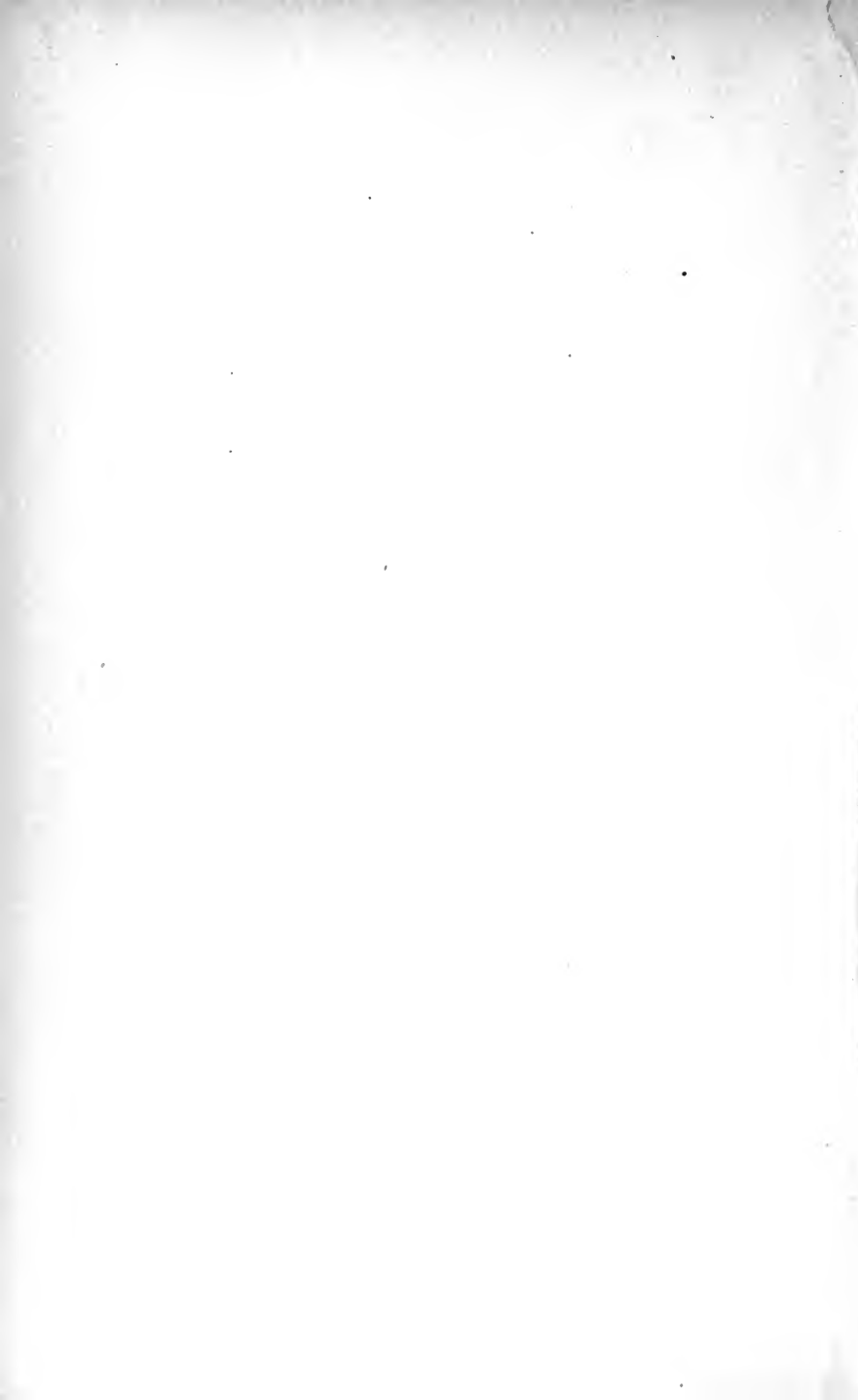


WILLIAM ROOT BLISS

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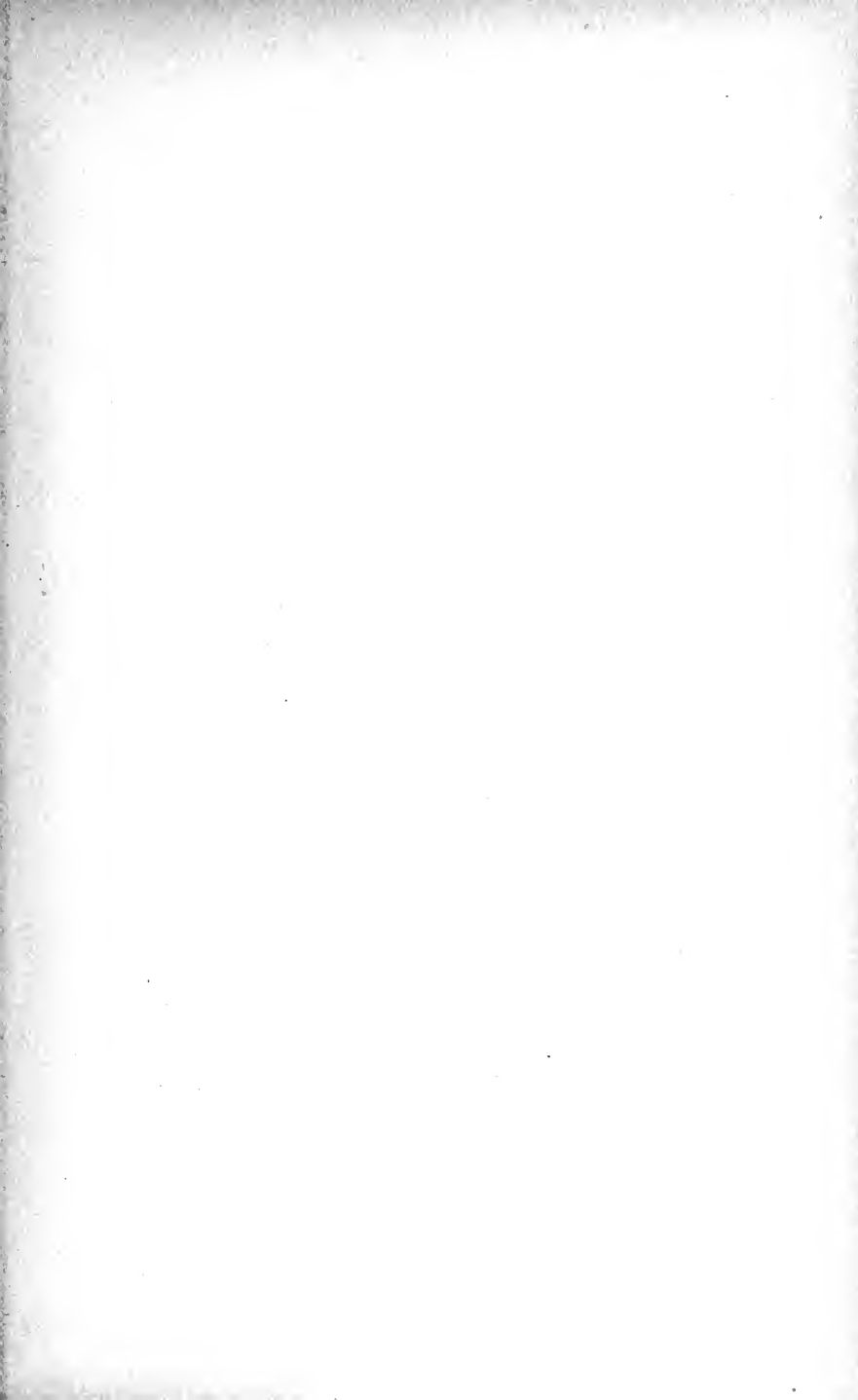
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# SEPTEMBER DAYS ON NANTUCKET

BY

WILLIAM ROOT BLISS



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GENERAL

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*Published June, 1902*

TO  
MISS NINA HOWLAND  
OF  
NANTUCKET ANCESTRY

193632



*You need not fear for a surfeit;  
here is but little, and that is  
light of digestion.*—QUARLES.



## BY—THE—WAY

*Two comrades went to Nantucket for a week's vacation. The island had been calling them a long time; but they waited for the cloudless days of September, when the throng of visitors has gone and summer is still lingering there; when not a leaf of the shrubberies on hillsides and moorlands has lost its brilliancy, nor one of the little wild flowers peeping up from the sods has wilted; when at noontimes they can lie undisturbed on sea-scented beaches, and gaze on an ocean sparkling in the mild sunlight of September.*

*Herein is their Nantucket Diary; descriptive, reminiscent, slightly historical, and flavored by the sea.*





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*A Voyage to the Island*





# SEPTEMBER DAYS ON NANTUCKET

## *A Voyage to the Island*

**Sunday** { About nine o'clock this  
FIRST DAY { morning we sailed from  
New Bedford in the good  
steamer Nantucket. We crossed Buzzard's  
Bay, stopped at Woods Hole, crossed Vine-  
yard Sound, stopped at Cottage City, and  
then began a rolling voyage to Nantucket,  
twenty-five miles southeast by south.

When our steamer left the last landing, she faced a dry easterly wind, which soon began to tear wreaths of spray from the crests of the sea; and when off Cape Poge, she was rolling and pitching so severely that those passengers only who had sea-legs could move about the decks. Occasionally a wave struck her in the face; then she

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paused, shivered under the force of the blow, and pushed forward on her contested voyage.

“ Her hull rose high, her bows dipped low,  
The surges flashed a-lee ;  
And the man at the wheel sang low,  
Sang he, —  
‘ O sea-room and lee-room,  
And a gale to run afore,  
Southeast by south,  
And a bone in her mouth,  
When bound to Nantucket shore.’ ”

Persons who assume to know the cause of seasickness say that it comes from a disturbance of the nerve centres produced by a lack of coincidence between the optical and the physical sensations ; the meaning of which seems to be that if the voyager sees one thing and feels another, seasickness will ensue. To learn the truth by experience, we seated ourselves in the aftermost part of the steamer, on the upper deck, and watched her various motions, accom-

## *A Voyage to the Island*

panying them by similar movements of our bodies; when we saw her head going down into the seas, breathing out we went down with it; when we saw it rising from the plunge, breathing in we rose with it; when she rolled from larboard to starboard, we followed the roll. Thus we kept ourselves in harmony with the steamer's actions, and found enjoyment in the wild commotion, as well as an assurance that —

“A life on the ocean wave,  
A home on the rolling deep,”

can bring upon us no discomforts.

Unfortunately, all our fellow passengers were not so happy as we were. Some were feeding Mother Carey's chickens; others, who were sitting in silence, with closed eyes and pallid faces, showed in various ways that the voyage was to them a long period of misery. One suffering woman preferred to lie prostrate on the deck.

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Could she have spoken, her thought would have been found in the words of old Gonzalo in "The Tempest," —

"Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground!"

When the steamer arrived at Nantucket, many people were on the wharf awaiting her; not because they were interested in anything that she brought, but in pursuance of an old custom to go down and look at every arrival from the sea. That is something for idlers on an island to do. They told us that the steamer had not been expected to make the voyage until the gale had blown itself out.

We spent the remainder of the day at our comfortable inn. The throng of guests which filled it to overflowing in July and August had gone; a few had come to enjoy the September days.

To refresh our memories concerning the history of Nantucket, one of us read

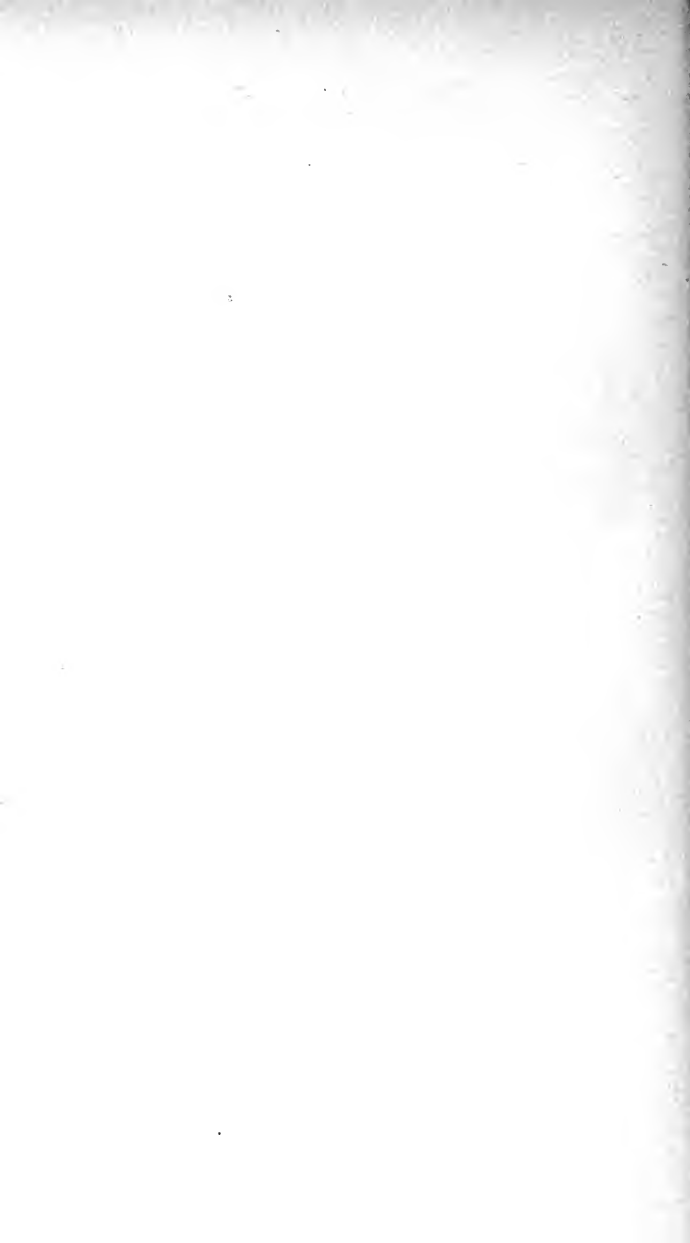


## *A Voyage to the Island*

aloud a narrative of its settlement, of its sea-rovers, and of the great power which the Quaker Society formerly exercised over the social and civil affairs of the island. If there are now any members of that sect on Nantucket, they speak low and go quietly their own ways. Sometimes there is heard a discussion whether the Society is decaying elsewhere; and occasionally a statistician attempts to figure out whether its members, by reason of a devotion to quietism, live longer than other people. Their small and well-governed communities, existing in various parts of the country, as well as in England, give no serious thought to such inquiries. They pursue the even tenor of their way, conscious of the fact that the past influence of Quakerism can never be revived.



*Old Windmills and Young  
Women*





## *Old Windmills and Young Women*

**M**onday { We spent this sunny  
SECOND DAY { forenoon on a hilltop  
west of the town, where  
stands a windmill that began to grind  
“the towne’s corne” in the year 1746. It  
is the most interesting remembrancer of  
colonial times that Nantucket can show to  
its visitors. The structure resembles the  
windmills which Thoreau saw on Cape  
Cod fifty years ago,—a tall, octagonal  
tower, shingled on its roof and sides; a  
long timber slanting from its top towards  
the ground, the lower end of it resting in  
the hub of a cart-wheel by which the arms  
that move the grinding machinery are  
turned to face the wind when the grinding  
is to begin.

The mill door was open. Within it

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sat the keeper, a gentle old man, who, it pleased us to imagine, is a lineal descendant of the first miller. He sat near the door, as if waiting for corn to be brought from the town, that he might earn the multure, paid in colonial times, of "two quarts for every bushel he grindeth." It was a reminder of Don Quixote's "thirty or forty windmills all together," when he told us that "once there were four windmills all together" whirling sixteen giant arms in the wind. Standing on an elevation of sixty feet above the sea level, those arms were the first landmarks to be seen from a ship approaching the island, and the last to fade from the sight of whalem<sup>n</sup> outward bound. "I must tell you," said the keeper, "that no Nantucket man or boy returning home from a long voyage could come in sight of those windmills without feeling his eyes considerably wet. I've been there myself;" and the gentle old man wiped his eyes as if he were there now.

## *Old Windmills and Young Women*

We can imagine the story: The ship has been cruising three or four years, and for a long time its company has been without news from Nantucket. When she comes within sight of the windmills, and her signal flags are read on shore, and her name is known, and town boys are striving to earn the fee of a silver dollar by being the first to report the arrival to families who have relatives on board, and a boat is rowed from the harbor to meet the ship when she comes to an anchor outside the bar, and to ask if all her company are living, or who is dead, it may be believed that a wave of emotion runs through the town as well as through the ship. There was a time when such occurrences were frequent at Nantucket.

Tarrying on the hilltop, we surveyed the prospect which extends beyond the town, beyond green fields, and far away over the ocean. How solitary appeared the position of the island. A visitor to the town

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sixty years ago would have noticed busy scenes surrounding many vessels moored at the wharves. To-day there is not a ship in the harbor, nor a ship anchored at the bar, nor a ship in sight on the surrounding sea; there is not a sheep grazing in fields where once the flocks were numbered by thousands; there is not a sound of labor in the town, which was once a hive of industry, where coopers, sail-makers, sparmakers, boat-builders, ropewalks, forges, candle factories, were at work the livelong day, with no lull in their noises except when the steeple bell summoned everybody home to dinner.

While men made the industrial noises of the town, women were numerous enough to make its opinions. They always outnumbered the men, and this disparity in numbers increased when the whale-ships sailed on long voyages farther and farther from Nantucket. Immediately after the Revolution, they were cruising as far south



## *Old Windmills and Young Women*

of the equator as the Falkland Islands. The ships were small, not exceeding two hundred and fifty tons burden, dull sailers, and scantily outfitted. Some of the cargoes were carried direct to London for a market, and were of large value, such as that of a ship commanded by Ransom Jones, which carried 7000 barrels of oil and 70,000 sealskins. When the news reached Nantucket, about the year 1789, that a packet of the East India Company, homeward bound to London, had seen sperm whales off the coast of Madagascar, two ships, that had just returned from Greenland, were immediately fitted out for what was called "a voyage of discovery in the Indian Ocean."<sup>1</sup> These were the first Nantucket ships that sailed beyond the Cape of Good Hope. A few years later Nantucket ships were hunting their gigantic game in the Pacific Ocean.

<sup>1</sup> Ship *Penelope*, Captain James Whippey ; Ship *Canton*, Captain John Worth.

## *September Days on Nantucket*

During the absence of many men on these long voyages the streets of the town had an air of desolation, which was not dispelled by the visiting activities of the women who, clothed in plain gowns of sombre colors, passed to and fro, seeking company and a "dish of tea" in their neighbors' homes.

At this period the town contained one dwelling-house built of brick, and five hundred and thirty houses built of wood ; they were plain without and within, representing the simple architectural ideas of a sea-going people. Many of the houses stood on top of the hill which slopes up from the edge of the harbor. At the foot of the hill were three wharves, each a hundred feet long ; when ships returned from successful voyages, there was a great bustle of business on the landing-place at the head of the wharves. Here barrels of whale oil were stored, in readiness for shipment to a market in Boston or London ; and the smell of

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oil became the all-pervading odor of the town. Between the landing-place and the top of the hill was the town's meadow, surrounded by a fence ; within it the herds of cows were kept after they had been driven in from the pastures at sundown. The streets were in no wise picturesque. They were lanes of sand, without names, without pavements, without footpaths, and were never lighted at night. Although the town was a great warehouse of illuminating oil, the Quaker merchants who owned it refused, year after year, to sell it for street lights, because, as they said, the price of oil is either high or low ; if high, the selectmen of the town must not increase our taxes by buying it ; if low, the owners cannot afford to sell it.

When the women were not going on their incessant visits afoot, they rode in two-wheeled horse-carts, over which a canvas awning was sometimes stretched. This vehicle, called a calash, was the only form

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of carriage on the island, until two wealthy Quakers, persuaded by their young people, ordered each a fashionable chaise from Boston. Any unnecessary expenditure of money was an immorality in the Quaker view of life, and therefore when those brilliant vehicles appeared in the streets the community was alarmed, and the ruin of the families of the importers was predicted. One man repented and sent his chaise back to Boston. The other repented not, but used his chaise until the townspeople became accustomed to it, when some of them sent orders to Boston for the same novel vehicle.

The disparity of numbers between the sexes made a young woman's chances of marriage in Nantucket far from even. Beaux were scarce, as they were in every seaport town. The scarcity is mentioned in a letter from Elizabeth Rotch to her cousin Sarah Hazard, visiting in New York: "I am surprised to hear thee com-

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plain of beaus being scarce in New York, for I always had the idea they were very plenty; perhaps it is of the younger class, as they must be somewhat advanc'd before they merit that appellation. Well, thee will find more of a scarcity on thy return."

If a Quaker girl of Nantucket married a Gentile, she was disowned by the Society unless she wrote a confession of repentance for doing what some of them said was the best act of their lives. The reality of the Quaker religion was such a great fact that managers of the Society did not hesitate to ignore the plainest truths about human nature by punishing both men and women who married out of the sect. Members of the Society were "set aside" if they merely witnessed the marriage of an acquaintance who was not a Quaker. It was their common practice to attend such marriages and absent themselves from the room during the performance of the ceremony. In one

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instance of record, more than thirty Quaker guests left the room and returned after the ceremony, in order not to witness it and make themselves liable to discipline.

But the Society did an act of justice to its women when it disowned Silas Ray, who, turning his back to the pretty girls of Nantucket, had "gone out in marriage with a woman in New Jersey." And yet he may not have deserved that treatment; for those scientific persons who have studied the physiography and botany of Nantucket are positive that these things prove the island to be a portion of New Jersey thrust up from the ocean.

What did young women do to pass away the time when the young men were absent on whaling voyages?

There was but little of "the soft play of life" in their experience. Music and dancing were forbidden pleasures. But as the wind bloweth where it listeth, so the love of those pleasures, born in the

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hearts of Quaker maidens, declared itself in spite of the Book of Discipline, and found vent in the homes of Gentile neighbors. When they were suspected of such acts, the selectmen of the town appointed night-watchmen "to suppress" what they called "the growing disorder of the young people that act inconsistently with the principles of morality and virtue."<sup>1</sup>

Some traded in small wares; taught, for the wage of sixteen cents per week for each pupil, in the excellent schools of the Quaker Society, whose children were educated apart from the children of "the world's people." They wove flax and wool cloths for home use and for barter; and occasionally they rode in their ca-

<sup>1</sup> The Gentiles were members of the sects (other than Quakers) mentioned in this paragraph from the Diary of President Stiles of Yale College: "July 31st, 1772. Mr. Shaw tells me Nantucket contains no Baptists, 4 or 5 Families Churchmen, and 150 to 170 Families Congregationalists, the rest Quakers and Nothings. There is no Episcopal Church, one Quaker Meeting, only one Congregational of which Mr. Shaw is Pastor."

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lashes to Palpus (now known as Polpis), attracted by its house of entertainment which stood near the shore of the upper harbor, three or four miles from town. There, says a traveler who visited Nantucket in the latter part of the eighteenth century, they have the pleasure of "throwing the bar, of heaving stones, etc." He also says: "By resorting to that place they enjoy a change of air, they taste the pleasures of exercise; perhaps an exhilarating bowl, not at all improper in this climate. I was once invited to that house, and had the satisfaction of conducting thither one of the many beauties of the island (for it abounds with handsome women) dressed in all the bewitching attire of the most charming simplicity; like the rest of the company she was cheerful without loud laughs, and smiling without affectation. I had never before in my life seen so much unaffected mirth mixed with so much modesty. The pleasures of the day



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were enjoyed with the greatest liveliness and the most innocent freedom, without a fiddle, or a dance. We returned as happy as we went, and the brightness of the moon kindly lengthened a day which had passed with singular rapidity."

Women, whose husbands and lovers were at sea, became naturally interested in marine matters and in the details of voyages. At neighborhood gatherings they were entertained by stories of adventure or descriptions of strange lands and people, which young men narrated after their return from sea. One tells of a tropical island inhabited only by men; never was a woman permitted to land on it. He tells how happy he feels that it is not so on their own island, and says there are no girls so lovely as the girls of Nantucket. If we may trust the opinion of travelers, they were not like the "nice" girls of modern novelists, who are described in the nursery jingle as made of "sugar and spice

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and all that 's nice ; " there was in the typical Nantucket girl a robustness of character, a gentle independence, an out-of-door freshness, which contrasted sharply with the sober mannerisms that surrounded her, through which she occasionally broke, as the island roses broke through garden fences.

There were visits to the Market Place, which, like a London Coffee House of the olden time, was a place to meet acquaintances, also to hear what news had come from ships at sea, to make bargains, to learn the price of oil in Boston, and what was going on in the town. In this market there were dealings for shares in whaling voyages; some of these are recorded in the book of George Gardner, who had retired from the quarter-deck of a whale-ship to the armchair of a justice of the peace. For example:—

"Nantucket 10 October, 1775. For thirteen pounds six shillings lawful money

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to me in hand paid by William Coffin, perukemaker, I do bargain and sell to him the whole of my voyage which I shall obtain on board the brigantine Beaver, Hezekiah Coffin master, bound to the coast of Brazil or elsewhere. — ALEXANDER HAY.”

“Nantucket 28 October, 1775. For thirty-six shillings lawful money to me in hand paid by William Coffin perukemaker I do bargain and sell to him the one-eighth part of my voyage which I shall obtain on board the brigantine Beaver, Capt. Hezekiah Coffin bound to the Brazils or elsewhere. — EBENEZER DOANE.”

In the Market Place were posted the arrival of vessels at the port and their departure. For example:—

“July 1st, 1782. Robert Spencer master of sloop Nancy, burthen 18 tons, navigated with 2 men, mounted with no guns, has permission to depart from this port with 300 of Beef for Swanzey.

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“December 20th, 1782. Reuben Macy master of brigantine *Desire*, 130 tons, has permission to take on board a cargo of Oyl for Ostend.

“February 1st, 1783. Christopher Gardner master of the sloop *Fox*, 30 tons, navigated with four men has permission to depart for Surinam with 17 casks Tobacco, 70 Quintals Fish, 7 casks Oyl, 7 boxes Sperm Candles, 125 Shooks, 600 of Heading, 4 barrels Tar, Some Oars, 1 bbl Pickel Fish.

“February 25th, 1783. James Bartlett master of the schooner *Hamilton*, 15 tons burthen, has arrived from Machias with 240 bushels Salt, 4 bbls Oyl, 2 casks Salmon, 1 box Pipes, 4 reams Paper, 40 wt Tea, 70 wt Pepper, 1000 Boards.

“May 31st, 1783. William Moores, master of ship *Bedford*, has arrived from London.”

All these things, trifling as they may appear to-day, were of some importance

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to the women who were representing a majority of the inhabitants of the island; but they were not sufficient to destroy the monotony of their social life, caused by the absence of men at sea and the prohibition of enjoyments in music and dancing. The "opium habit" was a natural result. The visitor to Nantucket, whom we have already quoted as a guest at Palpus, says: "A singular custom prevails here among the women at which I was greatly surprised. They have adopted these many years the Asiatic custom of taking a dose of opium every morning, and so deeply rooted is it that they would be at a loss how to live without this indulgence; they would rather be deprived of any necessary than forego their favorite luxury."

The influences of the Revolution caused a change to come over the orderly character of Nantucket, and a degeneracy in the quality of its social life. Taxes had

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been paid for the support of schools and the poor ; but not a penny had ever been levied to maintain a police force, or to light the streets at night ; and the Quaker inhabitants had no intention to change their parsimonious economy. The consequence was that tumultuous assemblies and riotous acts were of frequent occurrence, with a disregard of private rights such as is likely to prevail in any seaport town when there is no police force to preserve order. Two instances recorded by a Justice of the Peace illustrate the lawlessness of the town : —

“February 14th, 1783. George Gracie a Merchant entered Complaint against one John Bean a Merchant for insulting & threatening to take his Life. Upon examination pleads Guilty. Judgment is that s<sup>d</sup> John Bean find sureties to keep the Peace & pay Cost of Court & be committed till Judgment is perform’d. Costs 15/5.”

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“August 23d, 1783. Obed Hussey Esq<sup>re</sup> complained of Aaron Ralph an Indian for assaulting & striking him. Judgment is that s<sup>d</sup> Aaron pay a fine of 10 shillings or be whipt on his Naked Back 10 stripes, pay Cost of Court & be committed till Judgment is perform’d. Cost £2-8-9.”

A letter written from Nantucket to a Boston weekly journal of the year 1820, referring to those times, said: “Our wharves and streets exhibited groups of riotous boys, and even the yards and porches of our sanctuaries were profaned by their clamors in time of Divine service.”

This condition of affairs, with the infertility of the soil of the island, its inclement winters, the superior facilities for prosecuting the whaling business offered by the deep water harbor of New Bedford, were motives which caused several families to remove from the island before the end of the century. Some went to New

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Garden in North Carolina, a settlement begun before the Revolution by a few members of the Quaker Society who had been attracted thither by reports of a fertile land and a mild climate. Laban Mitchell, a minister of the Society, visited the homesick exiles at New Garden; and in a letter written to Mary Barker, of Nantucket, he said: "We seem to be more than a thousand miles from our beloved island, yet the regard I have for some there is not abated, of which number thou art one. I was like a traveller in a Wilderness when passing thro' Virginia where Friends had almost deserted their meetings. We had to stop at Public Houses & be waited upon by slaves, sometimes in log Houses with no windows & no floor, nor separate apartments, tho' the People were very kind and thanked us for our company. We are now at New Garden where our Unkles & Aunts, Cousins & Nantucket friends are. We are



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viewing them in their Houses & partaking with them of the good of their land. We are attending their Meetings almost daily. We have the company of Christopher Anthony who has travelled much in the Ministry. He told me to tell the women that he had seen the close trial they had been brought into leaving home. The weather here is quite as cold as it was last winter at Nantucket."

Charity Rodman, 23 years of age, writing to her sister Anna Hazard, relates the news, gives a sketch of home life, refers to a change of social conditions in Nantucket, and expresses a hope of removal to New Bedford. As there was no public mail to and from the island, letters were held by the writers until an acquaintance or the captain of a packet was to depart for the place to which they were addressed. This letter is superscribed, "favored by David Anthony."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Rodman family of Nantucket was descended

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*Nantucket, 2nd mo. 22nd day, 1780.*

I am now about performing an intention that has for some time been mine of giving thee, my beloved sister, a daily sketch of our transactions, such I mean as are worth notice or render'd so by the interested part we take in them. I think it will not be displeasing to thee, as there is scarcely any transaction however trivial but what conveys to the congenial mind a secret pleasure. The rain prevented the girls from going to meeting to-day; we are now sitting round the table employing the pen, which is indeed an agreeable resource when we are deprived of others; mama is reading the history of from John Rodman, a Quaker of New Ross, Wexford County, Ireland. Ruttys *History of the Quakers in Ireland*, published in the year 1751, says: "In the year 1655, for wearing his hat in the Assizes of New Ross, John Rodman was committed to Gaol by the Judge, kept a prisoner three months, and then banished that country."

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England. Jimmy Robinson came over in the packet yesterday & spent last evening with us. We have not now so large a number of evening visitors as in years past; thou wilt naturally conclude the alteration is pleasing to us all since there is so little society in the town that can justly be number'd with the agreeables. I have long thought that our happiness in that respect depended upon a small circle of sincere friends, where "heart meets heart," such as I hope to share if we are permitted to form one neighborhood & reunite our divided family at New Bedford.

*Nantucket, 2nd mo. 24th day.*

Yesterday was a snow storm which continued without much ceasation till near twelve to-day. I began to spin tow for the filler of our towels; the warp is nearly accomplished. Sister Sally join'd me in the afternoon; but it is tedious disagreeable business. I don't like it. Isaac Chase spent

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the evening here & call'd to-day to take a letter to send to New Bedford. Hannah watched last night with Tom Dennisses wife who lives in the house cousin Nichols us'd to; she has had a severe turn of the Pleurisy & is still very ill. Mama seems better, so well as to go about and card the flax for us.

*Nantucket, 2nd mo. 26th day.*

This day and yesterday too cold to spin. We have assisted mama in preparing the Carpet, sewing rags, &c. Jim Robinson who is yet I believe in town spent the afternoon here yesterday & Bill Miller evening before last. Perhaps thee hast heard me mention captain Greene, a person that Ben Dockray and R. Robinson have sailed with. He has lately married I believe a Mumford & Jim informed us they all dined at cousin Robinsons yesterday; did thee ever find such another family—people that they are under no

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obligation to, then to take in. Several of the Barkers from New York are in town. Tom & Abraham came a few days since & we hear this morning by Charles that the latter unfortunately fell down last evening and broke his leg badly, a sorrowful circumstance indeed. I can't tell in what situation the poor thing was; believe he was quite sober, but he will be hardly Judged; he was carried into Merchants Tavern & they were about trying to carry him to Dr. Huntinton's sometime to-day. I pity him sincerely, or anybody else that has need of Bonesetter Sweet's assistance. But this event tho sorrowful is not so alarming as one that has lately took place; day before yesterday Christopher Ellery went home to drink tea after which he took a letter from his pocket & while reading it fell in a fainting fit almost into the fire & expired before any assistance could be procured. The ink has several times froze in my pen. I dont know that thee can read

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it, I am very cold, the Girls have gone to Meeting & I must go & clean the great room. Farewell my dear I wish thee every happiness thou canst receive. My love & the familys attends you all.

thy C. R.

Elizabeth Rotch, wife of William Rotch, Jr., writing to her sister Anna, wife of Thomas Hazard, Jr., living in Providence, alludes to the changed social condition of Nantucket, and mentions with the news an expectation of removing from the island:—

*Nantucket, 3d. mo. 26d. 1788.*

. . . I imagine the Society thou associates with very preferable to what thy former situation here subjected thee to, and must confess the company of ones own connexions affords more satisfaction & real comfort than we can expect to find from any other source. Thy last letter is of so old a date that a reply would be quite un-

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seasonable tho the contents are very affectionate & afforded me consolation at the receipt; it was at the time my dear William was passing the disagreeable operation of Small Pox which he was greatly favored in, & has been very healthy since his return home.<sup>1</sup> We have not yet done anything towards removing but expect we shall get away some time next month. A melancholy account arriv'd here a few days since that a Schooner belonging to D. Starbuck on her passage home from Carolina was lost & all the hands perished, the Captain was Ruebin Coffin, Mate Jonathan Macy, son of old Jonathan, they have both left widows & little Children to Mourn their loss. Ephraim Congdon was likewise on board. The unfortunate Capt. Cole (belonging to Clark & Nightingales

<sup>1</sup> The "Pest House," to which persons were sent to be passed through a course of smallpox, was situated near the eastern shore of the harbor, within sight of the town.

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Brig) I feel much for; he is a person of great sensibility & is extremely wounded at the circumstance, he is quite agreeable in his behaviour & I think improves upon acquaintance, that makes me the more desirous lenity should be shown him by his owners. . . .

An allusion to the disagreeable change in the character of social life at Nantucket appears also in a letter of the year 1798 from Mary Rodman to her cousin Sarah Hazard, living in New Bedford: —

*Nantucket, 2nd Mo., 18th day, 1798.*

Altho the intercourse since the receipt of thy very acceptable letter has been much interrupted, yet there has been opportunity when I might have answered it if I cou'd have found any thing worth writing, and I seem to have but little at this time but if I cou'd see thee I shou'd have much to say. It is now very blus-



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tering weather and there is considerable Ice in the harbour, so that it's quite uncertain when the packet will sail for New Bedford, but I hope she will soon for the time has nearly arriv'd that we shall expect my dear Father, and perhaps the next packet may restore him to his long left family. Were we in New Bedford I believe the time would pass more agreeable than it does here, and if we move and go into Matthew Howlands house it will be very handy to yours, which will be very pleasing to me. . . .

The four windmills, of which the keeper on the hilltop was telling us this morning, were used during the war of 1812 to telegraph approaching ships that British cruisers were near the island, the arms of the mills pointing to the direction in which cruisers were seen. These cruisers caused severe losses to Nantucket. Its inhabitants, when petitioning Congress, in

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November, 1813, for relief, said: "A number of our valuable ships with full cargoes of oil have been captured and totally lost; and, what is truly lamentable, several of the owners who heretofore were in affluent circumstances, are now reduced to indigence; and we have further to anticipate a loss of fifteen valuable ships now absent in the whale fishery." The selectmen had stated that the population of the island numbered nearly seven thousand; but Congress left the people to shift for themselves. With a famine in prospect, they applied to the British admiral for aid. When he learned their destitute condition and peaceful intentions, he signed permits and passes for their vessels to go and fetch from New York supplies of firewood and provisions on condition that they should not share his favors with any of their countrymen who were in arms against him. The contract was faithfully kept; a British frigate anchored in the bay;

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its barges, flying white flags, entered the harbor and made landings at the wharves; its officers walked the streets of the town and accepted hospitality from some of the principal families, which were acknowledged by entertainments aboard the ship. When a fight occurred near the island between the barges and an American privateer, the wounded of both crews were brought to Nantucket, and whatever the people could do for them was done without any distinction between friend and foe. Among the wounded were two midshipmen of the frigate, who were made so comfortable by the family into whose hands they fell that they were not eager to recover too soon and be recalled to their ship. A Nantucket woman, writing about this incident several years after its occurrence, said of these young men: "They were permitted to enjoy social intercourse with the inhabitants, and acquaintances were formed by them which

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time and change probably did not soon obliterate."

The inhabitants of Nantucket were devoted to the principle of peace with all men, so long as the influence of the Quaker Society prevailed. Whenever military companies came to the island for a holiday, young women thronged windows and waved handkerchiefs, but there was no rise of military ambition in the town. Once a coterie of young men formed a training company and sent to Boston for equipments; but their elders compelled them to make the first article of their constitution to read: "This company shall be disbanded immediately in case of war."

While war was destroying the whaling business, the people turned their attention to other occupations. A letter written at Nantucket in May, 1813, by Gideon Gardner to his sister Mary, living in Rhode Island, says: "Not having anything to do, the fashion of business has

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altered. All have turned farmers except a few who have purchased small vessels to bring provisions from New York. Gil Swain & Dan Hussey arrived a few days ago with Flour & Corn. Others are gone & going. Flour is 14 to \$15. Corn 1.50. I fear many will have no money to buy with. The season is more forward than last year, and the grass bids fair for a good hay crop. I never had my gardens look so well as they do now. I have done much work on them myself, so much that my hand writes stiffly. The Brig Ocean, Capt. Absolam Coffin, has been captured and carried to the Cape of Good Hope. No news from any of our Cape Horn ships. It would be pleasing to me to have a brisk subject to make my letter upon, viz — a speedy prospect of Peace, and our whale ships returning with good voyages, but we must be content with our Fate and make the best of it.”

During the summer of 1815, when

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peace had returned, two lively young women from Liverpool, Nova Scotia, voyaging to New York, tarried at Nantucket. A letter written by one of them contains their opinions of the town and people. The writer of it had apparently been sitting in a corner and sighing, like Beatrice in the play, "Heigho for a husband!" In her eyes the men whom she met on the island were "good looking," the women "uncommonly homely."

*Nantucket, August 25th, 1815.*

*Friday Morning, Nine O' Clock.*

Here we are, my dear Frances, — in the Library of a Presbyterian Minister at Mrs. Careys in Nantucket where we are very pleasantly situated, after an uncommon fine passage with very little Sea Sickness. On Wednesday afternoon we found ourselves alongside the Long-Wharf, and were astonished to see it lined with persons of all descriptions waiting I

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suppose the appearance of the Nova Scotia Ladies at their landing. While we were preparing to debark our good Captain came below with information that a chaise would be ready in a few moments to take us to Lodgings. Accordingly in about ten minutes the ratling of wheels announced its approach and in a moment after the Capt. appeared at the Cabin door and presented a Young Gentleman handsomely dressed of a fine countenance and genteel and pleasing address. Judge of our Surprise when the name of Mitchell was announced, for it was no other than the very Mr. Aaron Mitchell to whom Mr. G. gave us the Letter. Oh! my Dear Girl I protest my Heart has received a shock of which it will not easily recover, for Alas! he is — married. But to return. We immediately followed our Conductor on deck and found his own chaise and servant into which we were politely handed by Mr. M. and another Gentleman with

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whose name I am unacquainted. We drove up the Wharf and through several streets and was at length set down at our present Lodgings where we found a kind little Woman ready to pay us every attention. Our only companion is the Minister before mentioned who is a young Man about thirty; a lucky circumstance you will say for our Lady Matron—as you are well acquainted with her partiality for Gentlemen of that cloth. Our Landlady informs us he is quite studious and his countenance confirms her assertion.

This Place far exceeds any idea I had ever formed of it. The number of Inhabitants amount to about Eight thousand, and there is supposed to be Seven Hundred Men now employed in the Whale Fisherys. There are two Meeting Houses for the Friends, two Congregationalist, one Presbyterian, and one Methodist. As we have learnt the Packet will not sail for New York until Monday I shall



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be able to give you a more particular account than would otherwise have been in my power. Adieu then, until afternoon when I hope to resume my pen and communicate something more concerning our Charming Aaron Mitchell, As we are momentarily expecting a visit from him.

*Friday afternoon, Four O' Clock.*

Our Friend Mr. M. has not made his appearance. He is undoubtedly engaged in attending to the discharge of the Flora's Cargo being a party concerned but I hope we may be more fortunate tomorrow. We have just returned from a walk through the South part of the Town in which Mrs. Carey accompanied us. The streets in some parts are narrow but the Houses generally have an appearance of neatness and comfort. Mr. Mitchells House is the most elegant brick House in Town. The soil is of sand, which renders walking quite a fatiguing exercise. But I think

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riding must be very pleasant. During our walk I in vain looked for Rocks and really felt quite disappointed at not discovering those Ornaments of my dear native soil. I am just summoned to Tea after which I will again inform you of all that occurs during our stay.

*Saturday Morning, Ten O' Clock.*

After I descended last evening to tea as we were chatting with our good Landlady a Gentleman entered the Room of a very pleasing appearance. He soon entered into conversation at once easy and polite, and before we parted for the night we were all equally delighted and some half in Love with him. He appeared equally Good and Amiable. It is not in my power to mention the Variety of Subjects on which he converses with the greatest fluency, but they were all calculated to improve and delight us. On enquiry we have learnt he is a native of

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Scotland but now residing at Schenactady in the State of New York, Consequently we shall be favoured with his company in our passage to that City. He appears about thirty-six years, of a good figure and very pleasing manners, and of the most extensive information of any Gentleman I have ever seen. His name is Mr. Culler and is a Lawyer by profession. Oh! my dear Frances why are we not favoured with (at least) One or Two such Gentlemen? What an invaluable privilege would their Society afford us. You may perhaps be surprised at my not having said more of our minister. But to say the truth he is very much enamoured of his Books. He keeps an Academy for the Instruction of the Youth of both Sexes and only preaches occasionally.

*Sunday Noon, August 27th, 1815.*

Just returned from Church where we were attended by our Two Gentlemen

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Mr. Culler and Mr. Pierce, the former becomes every day and hour more interesting and the latter is much more agreeable. The Minister gave us a Sermon about twenty minutes long, rather dry, his name is Swift and appears quite young. The House is large but not much crowded. The Singing was very indifferent; they have a handsome clock in front of the Gallery in which I saw no person except the singers. The Ladies here are all uncommonly Homely and Ungenteel. There are some tolerably good looking Gentlemen, tho not many of them. We shall not go out again this afternoon as Charlotte has the tooth ache and it is quite warm.

We are at present in a very unsettled manner with respect to writing being obliged to borrow Ink from the Minister in whose Library I am now writing. Don't fail to write me all the little occurrences that may transpire during my absence.

Ever yours,      MARY ANN HOPKINS.

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The growth of Nantucket after the war of 1812, and an increase in its population by the coming of new residents who were not Quakers, did not reduce the disparity in numbers between the women and the men, which was then as four to one. When, in June, 1834, a Congregational meeting-house was dedicated, the Rev. Thomas Robbins, of Mattapoisett, who officiated at the ceremony, wrote in his diary: "About four-fifths of the members of this church are females, and a part of the men are at sea." A minister of the town spoke of a shipmaster who, out of his forty-one years, had spent thirty-four years on the ocean. This remark caused a woman to say: "I have been married eleven years, and all the times my husband has been at home since our marriage amount to three hundred and sixty days. He has been gone on his present voyage fifteen months; two years must elapse before he can return, and when he comes

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home it will be a visit of a few months; then he will sail again on a four years' cruise."

She was asked how many letters she wrote to her husband during his last voyage.

She replied: "I know the value of letters; they are cool water to a thirsty soul. I wrote a hundred. I wrote by every ship bound to the Pacific Ocean from Nantucket and New Bedford. But he did n't receive all my letters. Some were brought back after he had sailed on his present voyage."

About this time there was a bookstore in the town advertising Frederika Bremer's "celebrated novels translated by a lady of Boston," a "Pictorial Life of Napoleon," Audubon's "Birds of America," in numbers, "Women of England," by Mrs. Ellis, and other books now long out of vogue; and there was what may have been a cir-

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culating library, announced in these words : “To let, five hundred interesting books, sui generis.” There were also stores advertising beaver and moleskin hats ; “a first rate tailor prepared to make clothes to fit and to suit ;” “metallic wigs, metallic toupers and all kinds of goods usually found at hairdressers ;” aromatic snuff, of which the buyer is assured that “after a long day’s work a pinch will be extremely grateful ;” Leghorn bonnets, and the latest fashions from New York ; “great bargains and low prices.” At last there came from Boston a cab ; attention was called to it by an advertisement in the Nantucket semiweekly newspaper of the year 1843, by which the importer “respectfully informs the citizens of Nantucket that he has just procured an elegant Cab to which he will attach a steady horse and hold them in readiness at all hours of the day or night. By strict attention to the wishes

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of patrons, careful driving, and moderate prices he hopes to receive due encouragement."

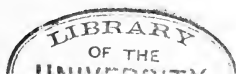
This solitary vehicle was noticed by a Boston newspaper correspondent of July, 1852, who, when enumerating the carriage conveniences of the town, mentioned "one cab at least."

The appearance of the town at this time may be described as unattractive. Nearly all the dwelling-houses were of wood, unpainted, without piazzas and ornaments; but more comfortable within than they appeared to be to an observer without. Connected with them were gardens which produced abundant growths of vegetables, currants, strawberries, gooseberries, grapes, and quinces. Fruit trees could not withstand the salty atmosphere and furious winds of winter, which sometimes crept in so mildly that garden flowers bloomed in December, and at other times came with storms and ice floes, preventing com-



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munications with the mainland. There were a few double dwelling-houses, built of brick, containing twelve rooms, but the value of real estate was so low that the yearly rent of such houses did not exceed one hundred and fifty dollars, and any two-story wooden house in the best part of the town could be rented for seventy-five dollars. Waiting for guests stood the old-fashioned tavern with its comfortable porch, its tall gate-posts supporting the jawbone of a whale, its yard gay with hollyhocks in summer time. Only the principal streets were paved; others were the same sandy lanes as of yore, and all were destitute of trees excepting here and there a solitary willow, or horse-chestnut, or silver-leaf poplar. Thrice a week the sluggish steamboat Massachusetts, Captain Lot Phinney, departed for New Bedford, and returned on the intermediate days, wind and weather permitting. Alongside one of the decaying wharves were the remains



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of the old marine camels which, in former years, lifted up the freighted ships bound from Nantucket to distant seas, and floated them over the harbor bar. The town in all its parts seemed to be waiting for that new birth which came at last with the summer throng. But the inhabitants had their own resources of pleasure. As Quakerism had lost its influence, and other religious sects had taken its place, there were dances and musical concerts, literary clubs, sewing bees, whist parties, and house parties, under the management of women who were in fact the rulers of the town.

Many accounts given by travelers of their visits to Nantucket mention the beauty of the women of the island. Their beauty and their intellectual quality are referred to in a letter written by an islander, and published in a New York newspaper so recently as the year 1853. It says: "As there is a great preponder-

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ance of numbers in the female population here, they enjoy great freedom and independence and are on the average superior to the men in intellectual culture; moreover they have no lack of physical beauty."

Beautiful women have the right to rank as historical personages; but those of Nantucket appear to have escaped the historian's pen until the Governor of Massachusetts came to the island in the autumn of 1825, bringing with him, as his aide-de-camp, a diarist. In those days a Governor was an unusual guest; no such dignitary had previously landed on Nantucket. He was brought ashore from the packet sloop in a whaleboat, and was cordially received by many of the principal citizens, who had assembled for that purpose. After the reception they escorted him to "the barber-shop" to inspect a collection of South Sea curiosities of which the barber was custodian. Barber-shops

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were central places of resort in New England towns; a writer of the year 1817, who was interested in what are now called Mayflower Relics, speaks of "sitting in Gov. Carver's armchair in the barber-shop at Plymouth." "Then," says the diarist, "came visits to the whaleships and the spermacitti works, dinners, and evening receptions, the latter being graced by the presence of very pretty young women." Saturday morning the visitors were jolted to Siasconset in horse-carts to eat a chowder; and on Saturday evening an entertainment was arranged for the Governor and his companions by Aaron Mitchell in his elegant mansion on North Water Street, corner of Sea Street, which, with its large greenhouses and gardens, was the richest homestead in the town.

This entertainment, without music and dancing of course, was said to be "the finest in all its appointments that the island had ever known." The aide-de-

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camp was there, and he wrote in his diary :  
“The number of beautiful and lively young women impressed me as exceeding anything that could be looked for in a similar gathering upon the mainland, and filled me with regrets that we were to sail at daybreak. I was expressing my feelings in this particular to a bright bevy of these girls when Hezekiah Barnard suddenly joined our group and put in this remark : ‘ Friend, if thou wishest to stay on the island thou hast only to persuade one of these young women to put a black cat under a tub and surely there would be a head wind to-morrow.’ The young ladies united in declaring there was not a black cat in all Nantucket, they having been smothered to detain husbands and brothers bound for the southern seas. At last Miss Baxter, the prettiest girl in the room, confessed to the possession of a black kitten. But would this do ? A mature cat, perhaps two, would be required

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to keep a governor from sailing; but an aide-de-camp could certainly be kept back by a kitten, and Miss Baxter had only to dismiss the governor and concentrate her thoughts upon me and the charm would work."

Next morning the young man was called up by his host, Barker Burnell, with the words, "Wind dead ahead!" As he could not leave the island, and it was Sunday, he went to the Quaker Meeting. He sat there nearly an hour in absolute silence, as did the entire assembly; and the silence seemed to him to be favorable for reflection and devotional feeling, until two women, who supposed themselves to be "moved by the Spirit," arose and addressed the meeting. Then, as he said, his feelings underwent a quick revulsion.

Was Miss Baxter there?

The young man's diary does not tell.

He sailed away on Monday morning. As he became a distinguished citizen

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of Boston, the story of his evening with Nantucket girls offers a fair scope for those who, like Maud Muller and the judge, are fond of ruminating on the "might have been."





*Old Houses and Ghosts*



## *Old Houses and Ghosts*

**Tuesday** } This sunny forenoon we  
THIRD DAY } went to examine an old  
house which is said to be  
the oldest house on the island. Jethro Coffin built it in the year 1686, when he was twenty-three years old and had just married Mary Gardner, a child of sixteen years. He braced the frame of the house with ship knees so that winter gales should not sag it, and he built on the face of its chimney a brick device in the shape of a horseshoe, so that good luck should come to it. But this token has not saved the house from "decay's effacing fingers." It stands dilapidated and solitary in a grassy field,—

“ Blistering in the sun, without a tree or vine  
To cast the tremulous shadow of its leaves  
Across the curtainless windows ; ” —

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and in all its details it reveals the hard features of a time when men and women were so poor that they were compelled to earn their living by continuous labor. The house is empty, like the abandoned shell of the chambered nautilus; those who lived in it having left long ago their "low-vaulted past" to build homes in some wider sphere of life than any that existed on Nantucket.

As a specimen of a dwelling-house in colonial times it is uninteresting. It is partly in ruins, it is small, ungainly in proportions, and hardly worth the attention given to it. In Massachusetts there are more than fifty old colonial dwelling-houses which are interesting in architectural designs and historical associations, and some are now the homes of descendants of the men who built them. Of such old houses the Whittier homestead near Haverhill may be mentioned as a perfect memorial of colonial home life; the birth-

## *Old Houses and Ghosts*

place of him who was by excellence the poet laureate of New England, and the scene of his famous "Snow-Bound." The visitor enters the same "old, rude-furnished room" whose whitewashed walls

"Burst flower-like into rosy bloom" —

when they caught the first gleam of the evening's fire on the andirons. The chairs are there in which the persons described in the poem sat during that winter night, and above "the great throat of the chimney" still hangs "the bull's-eyed watch" that

"Pointed, with mutely warning sign,  
Its black hand to the hour of nine."

As an object to be visited and studied, such colonial houses are more valuable than those of inferior type, like the Nantucket house, —

"Where all day long no voice is ever heard  
To stir the spider in his endless care,  
Where through the night no footsteps ever pass  
Over the splintered floor or creaking stair."

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Nevertheless, as one of the few curiosities which the islanders have to show, it receives many visits from summer people. They notice a little opening close to the front door, a peephole through which persons within the house inspected those who knocked on the door for admission ; it was especially useful to ascertain if an Indian caller was drunk, for drunkenness was the usual condition of the Indian population of Nantucket. The front door opens into a small space. On the right hand and on the left are doors leading into large rooms ; and over these in the second story are two similar rooms, reached by winding stairs supported against the chimney around which the house was built. The ceilings are low, the frame-posts are in sight, and the fireplaces are wide enough to receive cordwood in its full length.

Some country houses of the seventeenth century contained secret closets and haunted rooms, as described in the ghost

## *Old Houses and Ghosts*

story told by Tennyson, based on a legend related by James Russell Lowell of a house, near the place where he lived, which was vexed by —

“ A footstep, a low throbbing in the walls,  
A noise of falling weights that never fell,  
Weird whispers, bells that rang without a hand,  
Door-handles turned when none was at the door,  
And bolted doors that opened of themselves.”

Everybody who has a lingering love for the marvelous likes to see these places. Behind the chimney of Jethro's house was a secret closet which has a story to tell. One day when he was absent, and his wife and baby were spending an afternoon with a neighbor, a drunken Indian entered the house, ascended to the garret, and there fell asleep. At midnight he awoke, and while moving about in the dark garret the floor opened and he dropped into the closet below. He crept out into an adjoining room and began to sharpen his knife on the hearthstones. Mrs. Jethro was

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awakened by the strange noises, and seizing her babe she fled across the fields to her father's house pursued by the Indian; but as nothing tragical occurred, the story is not so thrilling as it should be.

If it is true, as Longfellow has said, that "all houses in which men have lived and died are haunted houses," it is also true that the sound of a knife whetted on a hearthstone may be heard at midnight in this ghostly abode of the past.

After going through the barren rooms of this house, up and down the foot-worn stairs, into the chilly chamber where an old fourpost bedstead gives to the garrulous attendant authority to say that here was the boudoir of a bride more than two hundred years ago, it was a relief to get out into the fresh air of a glorious September day. We sat down on a grassy slope behind the old house, and turned our thoughts away from the narrow and



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cheerless life which it represents to the wider and brighter life that now is.

There is another old house in the town, but it is not shown to visitors. Long ago it was a Quaker meeting-house; and some time after Quakerism had dissolved into thin air, it was moved to a foundation on the sand behind Brant Point Light; facing the harbor on one side and the bay on the other, making a trifling blemish on the landscape. Here it had its day of glory as a summer hotel. We stood on the decayed floor of its piazza and looked through the uncurtained and broken windows. On the office counter we saw the register book; it was open; an inkstand, a water pitcher, and tumbler stood near it. We fancied that a guest had just arrived, registered his name, drunk a tumbler of ice water, and gone upstairs with the office clerk to show him the way to his chamber. We looked into the dining-room; we saw

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the tables and chairs that were once occupied by summer guests; there were the decanters, goblets, and napkins; but no life nor sound. It appeared as if the house had been hastily abandoned; that the ghosts of those smooth-faced, solemn-faced men who, seventy years ago, were speaking in it as "moved by the Spirit," had suddenly come in and driven out the desecrators of their ancient sanctuary.

*Siasconset and  
Sea Worshipers*



## *Siasconset and Sea Worshipers*

**W**ednesday { This morning, in  
FOURTH DAY { a red-wheeled, rub-  
ber-tired, runabout

wagon, we started to make our first journey on the island. Leaving the town, we entered upon a straight, hard, smooth highway, recently built to replace the sandy way which, for more than a century, was one of the cart tracks leading to Siasconset. On each side of the road are vast fields of rolling land, treeless, unfenced, uncultivated, and yet the greenest fields that we had seen for many a day. Out of a thicket ran a bevy of quails, crossing the road in front of our horse and showing no fear, as if the mother of the flock had never seen a gunner. In the southern distance we noticed the abandoned buildings

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of a modern farming experiment, and beyond them we caught glimpses of the ocean. As we approached the end of the road, which is about eight miles long, we met a few travelers going to the town, we passed a golf-club house, and a wireless telegraph station which communicates with the Nantucket Shoals lightship, anchored below the southeastern horizon and forty-one miles distant from the island. Then we entered a sleepy village of one town-pump, two hotels, and many inexpensive cottages, which, during the summer season, are inhabited by families from all parts of the mainland. Cottages stand along the edges of lanes and byways which are called streets, and in open fields, and are clustered on elevations that overlook the sea.

Some of the small houses built long ago for the use of fishermen in the fishing seasons are also occupied by summer people. These are of one low story covered

## *Siasconset and Sea Worshipers*

by a broad roof, with queerly shaped extensions and conspicuous chimneys; for fishermen need large fires in winter when gales are howling over the island and Siasconset is pelted with snow. Land speculation was once rife along this fishing shore; customers for lots and cottages were cried for in New York and Boston as if this section of the island had been proved to be a paradise for mankind. New locations were laid out and given meaningless names that indicate a poverty in nomenclature not to be expected of people who enjoy life at the seaside. The ancient name Siasconset is locally appropriate; but it seems to be a violation of what Fielding called "the eternal fitness of things" to give the name Broadway to a silent, sandy, and grassy thoroughfare; and the name Sunset Heights to a section of land facing the east, while the sun continues to set in the west. Some of the cottages, so called, resemble comfort-

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able shanties, good enough for a vacation, and some stand so near to others that the occupants may occasionally hear from all around that pathetic plaint described by Wordsworth:—

“ An infant crying in the night ;  
An infant crying for the light ;  
And with no language but a cry.”

The attraction of Siasconset is a long, wide, sandy beach sloping up landward so far that its bluffs are beyond reach of an ordinary surf. The beach faces the rising sun, and on fair summer days little awnings are stretched over it and parasols are blooming on it like poppies. Under their shades lie the leisure-seeking people who live in the hotels and cottages. There they were when we arrived, lying on their backs along the sloping sands, motionless and silent as those only can be who are enjoying contentment and satisfaction of soul. There they were—matrons and maids, young men and gray-



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haired men, and even the sleeping babe to whom its mother sings:—

“ When my little son is born, on a sunny summer  
morn,  
I'll take him sleepin' in my arms, to wake beside  
the sea;  
For the windy waters blue would be dancin' if they  
knew,  
And the weeny waves, that wet the sand, come  
creepin' up to me.”

We hitched our horse to a fence, and hastened down the beach, to join the prostrate throng of worshipers of the sea.

Very different will be the scene when all the summer people have gone. Fishermen will move into their old houses, send their children to the village school, and renew the occupation of cod fishing which they suspended when summer began. They will land their fish on the beach, where summer people were worshiping the sea; townspeople will occupy the cottages that they leased during the

## *September Days on Nantucket*

summer ; savory odors of fried fish and chowders will be afloat in the air, and the homespun season of Siasconset will bloom until Jack Frost comes to spend the winter with the fishermen.

The habits and customs of those who live at Siasconset in summer are somewhat independent of forms and ceremonies. Sleeplessness is unknown. Gayety develops itself occasionally in a dance at the village casino ; but as gayety does not harmonize with repose, there is probably no more of it now than there was a hundred years ago, when Thomas Coffin, who kept a home of entertainment on the bluff, was "set aside," or expelled from the Quaker society of Nantucket, "for allowing a company of young people to dance in his house at Siasconset."

"When I went to Siasconset some years ago," said my comrade, "there was no ocean to be seen. I rode across the dreary moorland in a covered wagon, and through

## *Siasconset and Sea Worshipers*

a dense fog, the driver tooting his way along the road with a fishhorn, as if he were in danger of collision with some vehicle. As we neared the village, he blew his horn with more energetic toots, summoning the villagers to hurry out to the roadside and take the packages that he was bringing to them from town. I asked him to let me blow his horn; my blasts were so feeble that he chuckled at my efforts. When I reached the village, the fog covered the ocean. I was landed at a small hotel where I took supper, and as the landlady had no vacant room, I was sent in charge of a guide to one of the fishermen's houses to lodge. Walking through narrow lanes in the fog, we came suddenly upon what appeared to be a tall woman draped in white, standing in a yard.

“‘What is that?’ I asked.

“‘That’s Wooden Martha,’ said the guide, ‘figurehead of a ship wrecked on the Shoals.’

## *September Days on Nantucket*

“Near by was the house to which I had been directed. The owner of it, a tall fisherman, received me as he stood at the door in blue home-knit stockings; the sleeves of his flannel shirt were rolled up above the elbows, and by way of apology he told me that he always ‘rolled ’em up in June and rolled ’em down in October.’ The door opened into the living-room, where his wife, a motherly-looking woman, was seated before a small fire on the hearthstone. I was glad to join her, for the night was damp and chilly. She showed me to a little bedroom, its roof sloping down to two half windows, its feather bed piled up with comfortables. I asked the man what there was to be seen in the village. He replied: ‘Well, if you want to see some curious things, they’ve got an old clock and a splendid silver castor and Peregrine White’s silver spoon at the post-office.’<sup>1</sup> He lighted

<sup>1</sup> The *Boston News-Letter* printed, in July, 1704, a note respecting the reputed owner of this silver

## *Siasconset and Sea Worshipers*

a lantern and led the way through lanes between houses like his own, to a captain's house where I saw a group of people outside a window at which stood a young woman sorting the United States mail outspread on a table. She was calling aloud the addresses on letters and papers, and as fast as her calls were answered, the mail matter was handed out through the window. I found her to be an interesting person, a daughter of the captain, and she cheerfully showed me many old-fashioned things."

"How many years ago?" I asked.

"Ah!" replied my comrade, "if I answer that, the next question will be, 'How

soon: "Capt. Peregrine White, aged eighty-three years and eight months, died the 20th inst. He was vigorous and of a comly aspect to the last; was born on board the *Mayflower*, in Cape Cod Harbor, November, 1620; was in the former part of his life extravagant, yet was much reformed in his last years and died happily."

## *September Days on Nantucket*

old are you ?' Do you know, by the way, that you can ride to Siasconset in a railroad car that travels the eight miles from town in forty minutes ?”

In far away days the village attracted no summer residents from the mainland; its summer people were “the principal inhabitants of Nantucket.” So says a letter written by a woman of the island in the year 1846, who describes the place as “a little fishing village a few miles from town called by the Indian name of Siasconset, the resort in summer of many of the principal inhabitants of Nantucket; to them a perfect *sans-souci*, not from its elegance, for the houses are small, of one story, with something like defiance of all rules of architecture. But the very circumstance of their smallness and simple construction affords freedom from care; for who is not aware that there is more ease and comfort in the cot than in the palace, particularly to him who is the possessor of both ?”

## *Siasconset and Sea Worshipers*

In the village described by this writer the little houses, constructed by whimsical fishermen, stood on the grassy edge of a cliff, near to each other with backs to the sea. Westward the land rose to an elevation that shut off a view across the island, and served (so Obed Macy wrote in the year 1835) "as a barrier to the cares and bustle of a turbulent world." The village was like a raree-show to newspaper writers who visited it. They looked at the little houses as children look at toys, but were blind to the neighboring ocean and its "league-long roller" thundering on the beach. They described Siasconset as "a curiosity;" as "a little resort;" as "one of the lions;" as "a place where there is quite a number of funny little houses;" and one who had a misty knowledge of the geographical situation wrote to a Boston newspaper in the summer of 1873: "Siasconset is a funny little village on the ocean side of the island."

## *September Days on Nantucket*

More appreciative than those letter-writers was the traveler who wrote from Nantucket about the year 1775, when six rude huts, erected for the shelter of fishermen in winter, formed the Siasconset Village. He saw nothing that was "funny," but everything that was grand. He said: "I found the huts all empty except that particular one to which I had been directed. It was, like the others, built on the highest part of the shore in the face of the ocean. Here lived a single family without a neighbor. I had never seen a spot better calculated to cherish contemplative ideas. The ever raging ocean was all that presented itself to the view of this family; my eyes were involuntarily directed to it, my ears were stunned with the roar of its waves rolling one over the other as if impelled to overwhelm the spot on which I stood."

As it was then, so it is now. The magic of the sea is the charming power of Siasconset. It holds the observer fast, as the

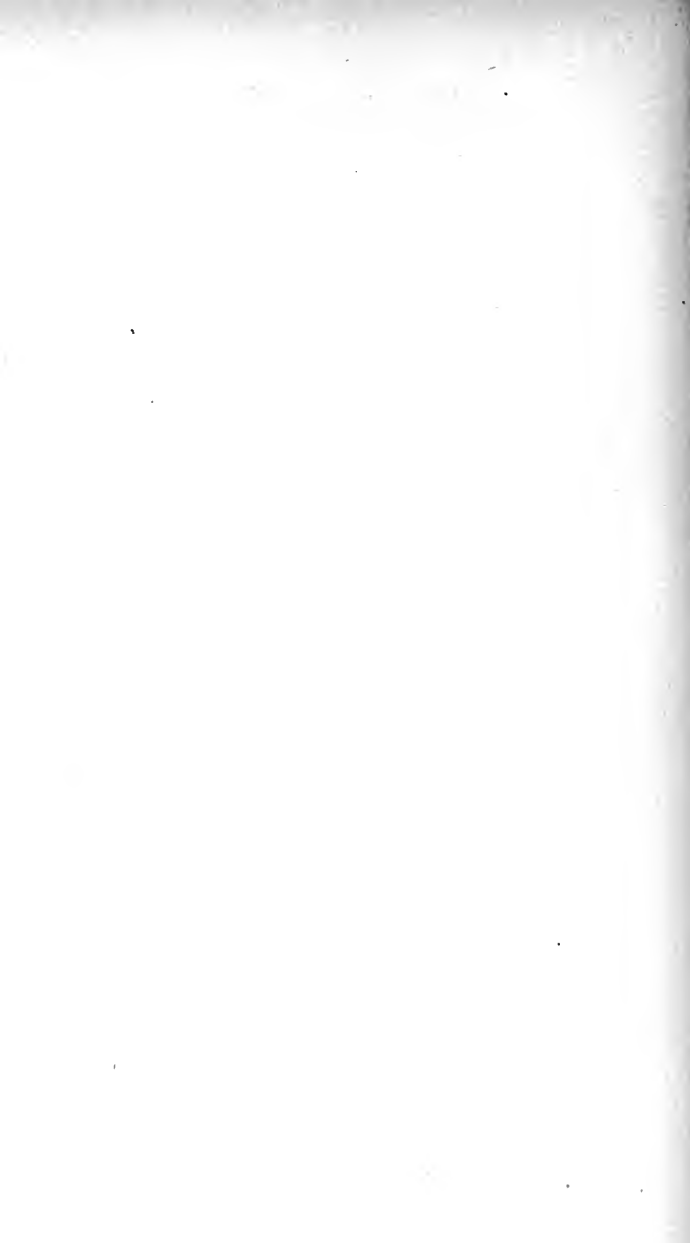


## *Siasconset and Sea Worshipers*

Ancient Mariner held the wedding guest.  
It so captivates the loungers whom we saw  
lying on the beach that many of them will  
return summer after summer to the same  
enjoyment of indolence and day-dreams.

When a strong wind is blowing out of  
the east, great waves pursue each other to-  
wards the beach, as if impatient to strike  
it and run foaming up to the bluffs before  
others can get there. But many days there  
are when the wind and the sea are gentle,  
when the waves follow each other lazily to  
the shore, and tumble wearily upon the  
sands as if too tired to go further. Then  
you are charmed by the scene as you  
look —

“ Eastward, still eastward, endlessly,  
At the sparkle and tremor of purple sea  
That rises before you a flickering hill,  
On and on to the shut of the sky.”





*Surfside and Tom Never*



## *Surfside and Tom Never*

**Thursday** { This morning we took  
FIFTH DAY { our red-wheeled, rubber-tired, runabout wagon for a ride to Surfside, which is the name given to a range of sand bluffs on the south shore of the island.

As soon as we were rid of the town, we entered upon a soft road, winding across a vast extent of level and unfenced land which is covered with turf and adorned with luxuriant wild flowers of various colors, and the ruddy fruit of wild cranberry vines. The flora of the island is so rich and various that we cannot avoid noticing it wherever we go. By reason of the absence of trees a great number of little flowering plants have established themselves on this moorland, where they are

## *September Days on Nantucket*

developed with a luxuriance which is never attained in shaded places.

“ The land in warm September’s golden hours  
Pours forth the glory of the waning year ;  
And, far as sight can reach, the myriad flowers,  
In serried ranks, o’erspread the landscape here.  
The purple aster, and the golden-rod,  
Imperial flowers, stand side by side,  
And here, beneath the radiant smile of God,  
Lies the vast splendor gleaming far and wide.”

Our road ends on the edge of a bluff facing the sea. Nobody lives hereabouts except the crew of a life-saving station, whose presence indicates that wrecks are to be looked for on the reefs near this shore at any time of stormy weather. In the bibliography of the island there is a brochure which describes the wrecks of more than five hundred vessels during the years since the island was settled. East of the station stand the remains of a big hotel which was hopefully built for summer guests. The ocean is crumbling away a

## *Surfside and Tom Never*

narrow space of the bluff in front of it, gales have split it in twain and carried away an end of it, and still it holds up to the surges its painted legend, "Surfside Hotel," as if to attract guests from the southern seas. We looked into the ruined apartments, and pictured to ourselves the gay scenes that illumined them twenty summers ago when the hotel began its speculative career.

The building was brought from Narragansett Pier, and reconstructed on the bluff where its wreck now stands. A narrow-gauge railroad connected it with the steamboat landing in Nantucket town, and during its first summer the road brought many guests. The Clan Coffin also came to the new hotel, and celebrated the memory of their ancestor Tristram, a leader of the company of proprietors of Nantucket, who drew lots for their homesteads in the summer of 1661. After the close of that first season, a letter written

## *September Days on Nantucket*

on the island was published in a Boston newspaper of December, 1881, saying: "The owners of the hotel are well satisfied with their investment; and well they may be, for against the predictions of croakers the first season's business excelled their expectations, and the future is big with promise." Alas! for the fatality of first impressions. There was no season like the initial one. The owners had planned to surround the hotel with summer cottages, and to make the hamlet a popular resort outrivaling Siasconset. They did not know how narrow and stiff are the limits of speculative ventures on Nantucket.

From the wrecked hotel run lines of sandy and grassy wheel-tracks eastward, following the contour of the shore, and passing Tom Never's Head, Tom Never's Pond, Tom Never's Swamp. These three South Shore landmarks are named on every map of the island, but nobody



## *Surfside and Tom Never*

answers the question — Who was Tom Never?

We conclude from what we have read of Nantucket history that Tom Never was an Indian living on this shore about two hundred and twenty-five years ago, appointed by the English settlers to be master of the section, to watch for and oversee the “cutting-up” of stranded whales. We also conclude that he was a brother of Jack Never, an incorrigible Indian thief who, “not having the fear of God before his eyes but instigated by the Devil,” did break “into Captain John Gardners house in the midel of the night and tooke out of Mr. Gardners pocket by the bead side five shillings and also opened a case and carried away a bottel with about a pint of Licquor in it;” so says the court’s record.

The gain of land from the sea is noticeable along the shore from Tom Never’s Head to Siasconset. The sea no longer

## *September Days on Nantucket*

reaches the bluffs, but is shut off by an area of sands extending some distance southward, and forming wide beaches. At other parts of the island the sea has gained from the land; as at Great Point, which is the North Cape of Nantucket, made, as geologists say, "of sands and detritus carried to the position by currents." The sea has eaten away the point to a distance of fourteen hundred feet within a century.

There is no sea marge, no beach of any kind, at Surfside. The sandy face of the bluff slopes steeply into the water twenty feet deep; the surges slide up and down the slope, carrying away more and more of the sand every year to lodge it on some other part of the island shore. To-day a keen southwest wind is throwing the spray of every breaker into the air, and sending up to us, as we stand on the edge of the bluff, the salty smell of the sea. Spreading our rugs on the slope, we seat ourselves in front of the ocean. Between us and that

## *Surfside and Tom Never*

dark blue rim, miles away, where sky and ocean meet, not a sail is to be seen; but we can see patches of blue and purple and green and gray, telling us that the sea is of all colors. One who has written admiringly of it says: "Those glimmering tints which often invest the tops of mountains are mere coruscations compared with these marine colors which are continually varying and shifting into each other in the vivid splendor of the rainbow." With all its beauty, it remains the never satisfied sea, always speaking its "eternal whisperings" to the crumbling land. Tennyson called its voice the "moanings of the homeless sea;" Aldrich heard in it a "strange articulate sorrow;" Bliss Carman fancied it to be "mourning about an ancient grief." None of these melancholy suggestions came to us while we listened. On the contrary, under the influences of sunshine and breeze, it seemed to be a voice of

## *September Days on Nantucket*

gladness. Exultingly did we repeat Whittier's verse : —

“ Good-by to pain and care. I take mine ease to-day.

Here where these sunny waters break

And ripples this keen breeze, I shake

All burdens from the heart, all weary thoughts away.”

Such enjoyment is all that is to be found on the solitary bluffs of Surfside.

Returning to town, we went down to the bathing-beach in the afternoon and sat on the rocks of the harbor jetty, watching children who were searching in the edge of the sea for snails and tiny crabs. The sociable dog of the bathing-master invited us to bathe by going into shallow water, lying down in it, and looking at us with inquiring eyes. As we did not accept the invitation, he came ashore and laid himself beside us, as if to be ready for any service that we might need. We remember him as a “good fellow.”

*Maddaquet and the Men  
with a Hoe*



*Maddaquet and the Men with a Hoe*

**F**riday { This morning we rode in  
SIXTH DAY { our red-wheeled, rubber-  
tired, runabout wagon to  
Maddaquet, on the western end of the  
island. At a short distance beyond the  
town we passed a granite stone set up on  
the roadside to mark the site of the house  
in which was born Abiah Folger, the  
mother of Benjamin Franklin. Further  
away in the fields is seen a granite memo-  
rial of John Gardner, a prominent man  
among the earlier settlers of Nantucket,  
who prevented the founding of an aristo-  
cracy of landholders to govern the island,  
which was attempted by Tristram Coffin  
and Thomas Mayhew. The contest, bitter  
and revengeful, lasted seven years (from  
1673 to 1680). Gardner was supported

## *September Days on Nantucket*

by public opinion, but his party in voting had a majority of only two, and this was destroyed by the bribing of Thomas Macy and his son-in-law, William Worth, who suddenly "whipped over to the other side." Yet, in spite of this defection, Gardner managed the contest so skillfully that, when the Coffinites were summoned before Governor Lovelace in New York, they said in complaint of the skill of their opponents, "Every card they play is an ace, and every ace a trump."

The road we are traveling loses its outlines after a while in undulating fields, under patches of moss, lichen, and dry grasses; from these it emerges at short distances in faint wheel-tracks, hard and dry like the traces of vehicles that may have passed this way a long time ago. Our horse follows a trail, discernible under the wild vegetation, until we reach its end on a flat and sandy shore. Here we stop



## *Maddaquet and the Men with a Hoe*

to take our bearings and listen to the strange silence of the region.

We have ridden to the edge of Maddaquet Harbor; not a boat, nor a landing-pier, nor a living thing is in sight; not a sound is heard except that of the west wind, which is blowing on our faces and seems to affect us with its tonic properties. It is the harbor and the shore where, as a popular tradition says, two Englishmen named Edward Starbuck and Thomas Macy, the latter with wife and children, coming from Massachusetts Colony in "an open boat," landed and spent the winter of 1659; not for their health, but, as is presumed, for their religious opinions. Here nobody could dispute a belief in the tenets of John Calvin, for the Indians who occupied the island knew neither Calvin nor the English tongue. As there was an abundance of forest wood in the vicinity, the two Englishmen, the woman, and the

## *September Days on Nantucket*

children were able to keep a fire burning through the winter; otherwise they would have perished. After they had ended their hibernation, the tradition says that the men went abroad on the island with a hoe to dig for fertile soil, but it does not say what they found. To-day the region is more desolate than it was then. There is neither a tree to be seen, nor a man with a hoe.

It may be doubted whether there was a harbor at Maddaquet in the year 1659, and whether there is truth in the tradition. If we turn to a chart made from surveys by British naval officers between the years 1700 and 1720, which gives the outlines of Nantucket island with the shoals and soundings of adjacent waters, we find no harbor at Maddaquet; but in place of the sandspit which now forms the southern boundary of the harbor, we find "coarse sand" under three fathoms depth of sea. The tradition says that the "open boat" passed around and outside Cape Cod;

## *Maddaquet and the Men with a Hoe*

and when meeting tempestuous weather, Macy's wife urged him to turn around and go back to their home; to which he replied, "Woman, go below!" Without asking where "below" is located in an "open boat," let us notice the fact that Cape Cod was, as stated by Bartholomew Gosnold, who visited it in the year 1602, an island. The island extended from Race Point to Eastham; between that town and Nauset there was a wide channel or strait from Barnstable Bay to the ocean. No boats went outside the Cape; small craft always went down the Bay, under lee of the Cape, and out to sea through this passage, which was open, according to Gosnold, in the year 1602, and was also open, as the chart shows, in the year 1717. A memorandum written on the chart opposite to the passage, probably written by one of the surveyors, says: "Ye Place where I came through with a Whale Boat, being ordered by ye Government to look after

## *September Days on Nantucket*

ye Pirate Ship Whido, Bellamy Commander, cast away ye 26 April 1717, where I buried One Hundred & Two Men Drowned."

That there were forests on Nantucket island when it was first occupied by white men has been disputed by geologists; but the fact is amply certified in records which contain various laws enacted by the inhabitants in town meeting assembled, to protect their forests from destruction. For example: on Nanahuma Neck it was forbidden "to fall any timber within its considerable woodland;" on the peninsula of Coatue, which is now as barren of vegetation as a sandspit (except where a species of cactus is existing), there were pine and cedar trees sufficiently dense in their growth to furnish a winter shelter for flocks of sheep; Indians were claiming an ancient right to cut firewood there, when a town meeting forbade "the Cutting of any more Wood of any sort off from

*Maddaquet and the Men with a Hoe*

Coatue." A law was also enacted by the town forbidding "to fall any more timber for rails and posts, and no timber for building howses," except at specified times.

Turning from the past to the present, we discover a life-saving station a mile away on the southern shore, and north of us we see a small gray house. We drive across a field to the house and knock upon the door, which is opened by a woman in the dress of one who is never expecting a caller at this solitary end of the island. In answer to our inquiry for the location of any road on which we can travel back to the town, she points to a stake standing upright on a distant hillside, and says it is the place where we can find a trail leading into a road that enters the main street.

This interview occurred outside the door; but now her husband appears and cordially invites us into the house. We learn that he is the lord of an estate at the eastern end of the island, on which he has

## *September Days on Nantucket*

built several cottages that are annually rented to summer people; and when his tenants return to their homes on the mainland, it is his custom to retire to this remote corner in search of rest and sport with his gun. He was formerly a business man in New York city. He came to Nantucket in search of better health, and remained to enjoy what he came for. He told us that he had found the climate of the island very pleasant from May to December; that in summer the thermometer sometimes rises to eighty degrees during the day, but the temperature during the night is always pleasantly cool; and it is a satisfaction to know that every breeze touching the island comes clean and pure from the ocean. He politely offered to each of us a glass of whiskey; but, being away from home, and feeling that there was sufficient exhilaration in the air of Nantucket, we drank cold water.

After thanking our host for his hospi-

## *Maddaquet and the Men with a Hoe*

table attentions, we mounted our wagon, drove to the stake standing on a hillside, and turned into a trail which our horse appeared to know. It is now high noon. Bareheaded, in the glorious sunlight, we ride leisurely across a long, wide plain which in former times was a common where were pastured thousands of sheep, tended by shepherds during all the year. There is no sign of human life or labor to be seen. On each side of us are hills covered like the plain with tall wild grasses that have not been mowed since the sheep were killed. The tops of the grasses, yellow and gray, are waving in the wind and flashing in the sunlight as we ride in friendly silence, our senses on the alert to catch every feature of the strange scenery which seems to have an emotional attraction of its own.

At last we emerged from this region on a traveled road that led into the main street of Nantucket town.

## *September Days on Nantucket*

In the afternoon we visited a shop where old colonial house furniture is exhibited, and looked with admiring eyes on mahogany highboys and lowboys with flame and scroll tops, bandy legs, claw feet, and shell enrichments. As it is known that inquisitors of the Quaker Society sometimes entered the houses of members, and with instruments removed ornaments from the furniture, it is not probable that such beautiful articles as these were commonly seen in the homes of colonial Nantucket. Then we went to the rooms of the Historical Association and examined its interesting memorials of other times. We ended the day with the enjoyment of hot salt water baths in a tidy bathing-house standing on the shore.



*Wauwinet and Sankaty  
Light*



## *Wauwinet and Sankaty Light*

**S**aturday } This sunny morning, in  
SEVENTH DAY } our red-wheeled, rubber-  
tired, runabout wagon  
we rode to Wauwinet, a hamlet on the  
eastern end of the island, nine miles from  
town as the road goes.

Turning off from the macadamed thoroughfare to Siasconset, we enter upon an old highway that veers to the northeast, and opens many views of the town we are leaving behind. Occasionally we pass between groups of fragrant pine-trees; on hillsides we see large patches of hazelnut bushes, the leaves being remarkably brilliant in the sunlight, and we catch the odors of sassafras and sweet ferns. In colonial times this region was spoken of as the garden of Nantucket. There were

## *September Days on Nantucket*

farms producing large crops of corn and wheat. Those old wheel-tracks that we see, covered by mealplum vines, are probably the remains of by-roads which connected neighboring farmhouses with the highway to town. Under the date of August 8, 1761, President Stiles of Yale College wrote in his diary, "Mr. Josiah Barker of Nantucket told me that the Island has about 800 families on it. They have 6000 or 7000 Sheep. They buy 50 or 60 Sheep from the mainland yearly. They plant 900 to 1000 acres of Indian Corn." In truth, Nantucket men were farmers long before they became seamen. The first thing done by those who drew lots for homesteads in the year 1661 was to lay out fields for corn; and in the year 1665 forty-eight farmers registered the earmarks of herds and flocks then at pasture on the island. If they tilled the land in the careful manner of their British kinsmen, the farming accounts (could we

## *Wauwinet and Sankaty Light*

find them) would give an interesting insight of agricultural life more than two centuries ago. They would tell of women and children as helpers in the harvest fields; of acres of grain and weights of wool produced; of barley winnowed, and tailings given to pigeons, pigs, and horses; of salting the bacon and brining the wheat; of keeping of the flocks, and how the shepherd's wife was willing to lend a hand in "lambing tyme." But those early farmers left no mark save these old roads.

We notice old houses and lands that are advertised "for sale;" the painted signs announcing the fact have become almost illegible while waiting for a buyer who does not come. Yonder we see Quaise Point, which John Swaine bought from the Indians in the year 1686, and paid for it a toll of one bushel of wheat annually during his life. There, in the time of the Revolution, was the country home of Keziah Coffin, a famous woman who, while

## *September Days on Nantucket*

her husband was at sea on his first cruise, traded in pins and needles, and also kept a little school for the children of her neighborhood; after a while she traded in larger merchandise than pins and needles; she established a system of mercantile business with connections in London, became an importer and a smuggler, acquired wealth and a farm at Quaise, and built what was called the best house on the island. Her husband gave up the pursuit of whales in distant seas, and being a contemplative man, he came ashore and quietly enjoyed the home and fortune which the skill of his masterly wife had acquired. In the Revolutionary War Aunt Keziah, as she was called, was, like a majority of the women of Nantucket, a Tory; and it is said that she dressed herself in black as a sign of her sorrow for the rebellion of the colonies against his most gracious Majesty the King.

Passing by the site of Palpus, we are

## *Wauwinet and Sankaty Light*

reminded of its ancient **H**ouse of **E**ntertainment, and how often the people of the town rode to it in their calashes, a century ago, to enjoy its exhilarating bowls and spend an idle day. Then touching the whip to our horse, we sped along the road to the hamlet called Wauwinet. That was the name of the Indian sachem who ruled over this region before the white men came.

We hitched our horse to a post standing in the sand, the last remnant of an ancient fence of rails, and looked about us. We saw a house prepared to serve fish dinners, a few small dwellings occupied by summer people, and a sailboat landing a picnic party just arrived from town.

Not far away is a Haulover, a narrow beach having the ocean on one side of it, and on the other side a branch of Nantucket harbor. The beach attracts us at once; it seems to be the place where "it is always afternoon." We hear the faint "dick-a-dee" of a sandpiper while it runs

## *September Days on Nantucket*

and stops and runs again, searching the shore for something to eat; and the squeak of gulls that are wheeling and soaring and flitting low to examine whatever is drifting on the sea; and the cry of the piping plover whose voice, Thoreau says, is like "a fugacious part in the dirge which is ever played along the shore for those mariners who have been lost in the deep since it was first created." Rare and beautiful species of shore birds are not here; if a solitary one should venture to alight on any part of the island, it would probably be killed by a sportsman or a naturalist who is seeking to destroy the creature that deserves to live.

Along the edge of the ocean we strolled, picking up shells; their delicate hinges were broken and the homes were empty, as if the little beings that had lived in them went out this morning for an airing and the thievish waves seized their homes, scoured them clean, and flung them on the



## *Wauwinet and Sankaty Light*

sand. It is easy to recall the argument of an eloquent preacher that each of these tiny shells is as "full of the idea of design as any star in the heavens, and if the nebular hypothesis be the explanation of the creation of worlds, there is no star that is so far advanced in the order of development as these minute shells and their unknown tenants."<sup>1</sup>

Through our glasses we watch the ships that appear and disappear on the distant horizon, and the flotsams drifting in the currents. South of us stands the tower of Sankaty Light, which nightly flashes its white flame —

"Onward ever, and outward ever,  
Over the uttermost verge of the sea," —

except when dazed seabirds plunge headlong through the glass lantern and extinguish the light.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Slicer.

<sup>2</sup> "Nantucket, April 2d, 1902. Two wild ducks,

## *September Days on Nantucket*

The cliff on which the lighthouse stands rises about eighty feet above high tide, and has attracted much attention from geologists, who have spoken of it as the most interesting section of the island on account of its fossiliferous deposits. Unlike other cliffs on these shores, it is covered by a thick growth of wild vegetation, which, it is said, is due to the northward advance of Siasconset Beach, fending the cliff from the action of the sea.

As an example of the imagination of correspondents who have passed a day or two on the island and visited this shore, let us read from a letter published in a Boston newspaper of July, 1852: "Nantucket is itself a great beacon; and, for the protection of Vineyard Sound and hun-

weighing about seven pounds each, crashed through the lantern of the lighthouse at Great Point last night, extinguishing the light. The broken glass plate measured 6 feet by 27 inches and was three eighths of an inch thick."— *Press Report*.

## *Wauwinet and Sankaty Light*

dreds of ports on the coast, it is furnished with quite a constellation of lighthouses." The truth is that the island has but two lighthouses, besides Sankaty, useful in navigation; one of these is a harbor light on Brant Point, and the other a sea light on the northernmost extremity of Coatie. Another correspondent, writing to a Boston newspaper of July, 1877, says: "Nantucket is replete with monuments grown gray with age, Indian relics, and other sadder ones snatched from the vasty deep. From Tuckernuck to Sankaty Light there is n't a rod of land without its traditions, nor a living being from whom an hour's converse cannot obtain an interesting stock of information." A postscript of this letter seems to reveal the writer of it; for it says: "The watering-place beat has made his appearance at Nantucket."

Failing to find the gray monuments, and the sad relics, and the living being on every rod of land waiting to give us a stock of

## *September Days on Nantucket*

information, we follow the summer custom and lie down on the sloping sands. The day is before us as well as the ocean, and we are not in haste to return to the town. While the lace-shaped spindrifts of the surf are running up near to our feet, we sing the words of Carolyn Wells:—

“ Come with the rest of us  
Down by the sea ;  
There is where we  
Show out the best of us ;  
Holiday keep  
Chums with the waves ;  
When saucy winds sing,  
All of our cares  
Back of them fling  
And bury them deep  
Down by the sea.”

# *The Town and the Captains*



## *The Town and the Captains*

**S**unday morn } Our seven sunny  
LAST DAY } days will come to  
} an end this noon,  
when the steamer Gay Head is to carry us  
away from the island.

At an early hour we wandered into the country, without a purpose except to enjoy once more the delicious outdoor air of Nantucket. We turned our steps into an ancient burial field, read the inscriptions on old gravestones, and then seated ourselves in the sunlight on top of a brick tomb dated a hundred years ago, and talked about the pleasures of the week, never to be forgotten. The ground around us was covered with tiny wild flowers and the red remains of brier-roses that bloomed last June. Before us

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the landscape extended to the ridge of a distant hill, on the edge of which we saw the silhouette of a purple cow, the very cow described in the Nonsense Book, that "ate of naught but violet flowers."

Then there passed along the highway an old man driving a cart. Seeing us sitting atop the tomb he cried out:—

"Hello, Cap'n! Don't fall in! You'll get in soon enough if you wait!"

We approved his wit, thanked him for his warning, and, recognizing him as a representative of the island, we bade him good-by.

The permanent residents of the town, some of whom live in those comfortable-looking houses that are to be seen in many streets, are proud of their descent from brave seafaring men, whose sea-journals, containing the story of voyages and discoveries, are the historical literature of Nantucket. Although they did not invite the summer stranger to make their island



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home the scene of his leisure, they are glad to see him, provided he shall write no silly letters about it to newspapers,<sup>1</sup> nor defame their revered captains.

A fine specimen of the "silly letter" appeared in a New York newspaper, August 23, 1896, in which the writer of it, describing "Nantucket twenty-five years ago," said: "The inhabitants regarded a stranger coldly, but compassionately. He was received on probation, which was not at all a matter of form. Cases were not unknown when gallants from the mainland had been chased over dune and dale the livelong night by fishermen as wrathful as they were sturdy. . . . A funereal peace prevailed in the town, the deeper for the absence of undertakers. The doors of the poor-house and of the

<sup>1</sup> The general inability of traveling correspondents to esteem Nantucket rightly is illustrated by one who wrote to a New York newspaper: "Baalbec was a puzzle, Tadmor was a wonder; but Nantucket is a miracle."

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jail were never locked; the selectmen rejected keys as extravagant luxuries." The same correspondent, describing a fire "late one night," said: "There was a mighty commotion throughout the old burgh. The Queen Anne bell clanged shrilly. Men, women, and children devotedly rushed to the fire. The wind was blowing a gale. The women formed lines and passed and repassed buckets. The children spread wet blankets on roofs and stamped out sparks. The men kept the hand engines hot with pumping. The water supply was dependent on wells which were quickly exhausted; but no matter, there was an abundance of strong and willing arms. The lines were extended further and further. The engines were moved hither and thither, and so the deluging was never slackened. With the morning light the families returned to their homes, drenched, disordered, wild-haired, but triumphant," etc.

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As to the revered captains, they are not, as some newspaper correspondents have described them, "battered old hulks;" nor are they the jolly mariners of the drama who exclaim, "Blast your eyes!" and "Shiver my timbers!" when conversing with each other. They are heroes of the sea, who have been anointed with oil. Some of them went afloat before they were twelve years old; some of them while boys doubled Cape Horn when "it was nothing but haul down and clew up," in rain, sleet, and snow. Now, having furled their topsails and retired from a life at sea, they meet socially, not as a club, but as men whose lives have been passed in similar dangers and experiences. They sit in their own armchairs, in their own room, on the first floor of the old brick building that stands at the foot of Main Street, and there they intelligently discuss all current topics. A man who happens to be in the public eye and is

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steering a wrong course, or a summer visitor to the island who is carrying too many sails, will be passed with the conclusion that "He may possibly get over the bar at low water;" a reminder of the fact that only vessels of the shallowest draft can cross the harbor bar when the tide has ebbed.

A townswoman describes the captains as chivalrous and upright men, kindly if humorously tolerant, whose faces are strong and serene, and whose failing sight is yet keen enough to see straight through a pretender. "As they sit around the fire," she says, "or when summer lures them out to the sidewalk, and they tilt back their chairs comfortably under the trees, exchanging friendly greetings with passers-by, we look upon these splendid men and think how soon the time will come when not one of them will be left; and we devoutly hope that the ready-writer will spend his vacation elsewhere,

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and so leave us in peace with our captains upon the blessed island which by their presence they have made sacred to us forever.”<sup>1</sup>

The town offers to strangers no special attractions for passing the time. Formerly there were to be seen in it collections of curious things that had been brought by Nantucket whalemén from the ends of the earth. A whaleman's widow had a museum of interesting South Sea curiosities which she exhibited and talked about to her audiences, pointing a long stick to the articles described in her fluent speech. Her curiosities were real ones, and her stories were true. Now the curio business is in the hands of summer shopkeepers, and the widow's occupation is not in fashion.

In the shops they offer for sale excellent photographs of scenery in all parts of the island. They offer corals and tropical

<sup>1</sup> *A Protest*, by Mary E. Starbuck.

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shells, whale's teeth, swords of the sword-fish, sea mosses inclosed in scallop shells, old furniture, pewter porringers, brass candlesticks, blue chinaware, and many small articles of bricabrac. They also offer a few old shingles taken from old houses. These are tied together with ribbons; sometimes they form covers to a series of interesting photographs, appealing to you like a blind beggar with a certificate of age and character. They may be suitable tokens of a visit to Nantucket; but we prefer a new shingle to an old one when we have any use for shingles.

The town is neither quaint nor peculiar in its appearance. The odd, the antique, and the simple in manners and customs, which, under the name of quaintness, were characteristic of Nantucket for nearly two centuries, and are still spoken of by those

“ native here and to the manner born,”

are now unknown. The heart of the town,

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comprising an area of thirty-six acres, on which stood three hundred and sixty buildings, including costly mansions, public edifices, and valuable stores, was burned to ashes in a night of July, 1846. A Nantucket newspaper of that year says: "No forms of language can convey an accurate idea of the horrors of that memorable night. No rain had fallen in a long time, and the houses, which were chiefly of wood, had become, by the agency of many long days of unbroken sunshine, amply ripened for the fire. The flames flew from house to house, crossing streets, lanes, and courts with such unaccountable and capricious irregularity as to set at defiance the calculations and exertions of firemen and engineers. Explosions of gunpowder and torrents of water seemed alike unavailing to stop them, though directed by the most desperate and determined spirits. Men fell powerless in the highways, utterly worn down and disheartened. Fire engines

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were yielded to the flames which poured in upon them from opposite quarters. Vast quantities of oil stored in sheds and yards, heated in the casks, burst forth upon the ground, became at once ignited, and rolled in fiery floods into the harbor, covering the surface of the water to a great distance with sheets of flame."

The value of the property destroyed was estimated by the selectmen of the town to be one million dollars, of which only a third part was insured. The fire sifted the population and compelled many families to move to the mainland and begin anew the work of life. The burnt area was gradually rebuilt, but there is not to be found in it any indication of that spirit of enterprise which caused the old town to be ranked as the third important city of Massachusetts.

The daily movement of the throng of people which seeks Nantucket in July and August is interesting to persons who have



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come from homes in quiet places ; but summer days on the island are not more delightful than the days of September and October, after the movement has ceased. Those who describe the glories of these months speak of the wide horizons that greet the eye, of the pure colors in sunsets, of the soft lights that rest on the ocean when stars fill the heavens with a peculiar splendor ; of the swamps, hillsides, and valleys brilliant with warm shades of red, brown, and yellow. There being no forests on the island, all the low-growing shrubs show themselves in their natural character ; the sedgy margins of creeks and ponds and the mossy carpet of the commons exhibit an indescribable beauty of their own. The surf rolls lazily against the shore, or under a freshening breeze it breaks with exultant leap upon the sandy beaches. The wine of life is pressed to the lips in such generous measure that the tarrier on the island rejoices to have seen

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Nantucket after the season of summer has ended. Indeed he might say, as said Ulysses to Calypso of the enchanting island : —

“ I ’ll drift no more upon the dreary sea,  
No yearning have I now, and no desire.  
Here would I be, at ease upon this isle,  
Set in the glassy ocean’s azure swoon,  
With sward of parsley and of violet,  
And these low-crying birds that haunt the deep.”

*Various Opinions  
concerning  
“Quaint Nantucket”*

## *Various Opinions concerning*

“Quaint Nantucket” by its contents makes persuasive appeal to lovers of endlessly interesting Nantucket, who are not few, and to lovers of the quaint who are many. Mr. Bliss has given us a very delightful book. From sea journals, from records of the Friends’ Meeting, from town archives, he has gathered material for his sketches of the Quaker island as it was long ago. He has shown much wisdom by choosing the salient, the picturesque and the typical; and since he has gleaned solely in the interests of entertainment, and with no theory to buttress, the result is instruction without dullness and knowledge gained by exceedingly pleasant paths. No chapter is more interesting than that which presents Nantucket under the Quaker rule, through which broke often the willful nature of Quaker maidens. Sarah Darling, for example, was “treated with” by the brethren for consorting with a lover not of the faith; but they “don’t find any disposition in her to condemn herself;” Deborah Smith who, when dealt with for not using the thee and thou, sent back word that she “did n’t think she ever should!” — *Boston Transcript*.

## “Quaint Nantucket”

William Root Bliss has given us a delightful book in his “Quaint Nantucket.” He has gone below the surface and produced a picture of the Nantucket of a bygone time that is full of interesting facts and memories. The environment of the islanders developed personal traits, and Mr. Bliss has found evidence of it in chronicles of the town, in records of the Society of Friends, and in ancient log-books. The chapter entitled the Dominion of the Quakers is curious and interesting. The extent to which the Meeting interfered with the personal concerns of young and old is a singular example of early American theocracy. The log-books of the whaling fleets are a source of constant delight. Mr. Bliss tells a story of an old salt who removed from Nantucket to the banks of the Hudson where he became a farmer. One day he drove to the city with a load of produce, to be gone three days. It was five years before he got back to his family. He found a ship fitting out for a whaling voyage, and the restless longing in his blood was roused and away to sea he went. — *Brooklyn Eagle*.

## *Various Opinions concerning*

We have had occasion more than once to give hearty commendation to the books about old New England, written by William Root Bliss. In "Colonial Times on Buzzard's Bay," "Side Glimpses from the Colonial Meeting House," and other books, Mr. Bliss has recreated New England as it was, and he is the first to give to the reading public just what he found instead of what a loyal New Englander might like to have found. In "Quaint Nantucket" we learn how the people of the island made their settlement, and established their government, how they were more loyal to the Dutch of New York than to the English, how Indians were punished and the Quaker Meeting was established. Here are extracts from court records and journals of sea rovers, just as they were written. The intelligent reader would prefer to have such materials with which to make his own pictures, rather than be told how life looked to somebody else. One does not have to see Nantucket to appreciate Mr. Bliss's very interesting book. Harvard should make him a professor of history. — *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

## “Quaint Nantucket”

After reading Mr. Bliss's book we are left with the impression of a very interesting history of Nantucket. A striking chapter is that which deals with sea journals. In particular the journal of Peleg Foulger, who interspersed his sea news with moral reflections, is a fascinating document.

“We Struck a large *Spermaceti* and killed her and then we cut a Scuttle in her head and a man Got in up to his Armpits and dipt almost six hogsheads of clear oyle out of her case, besides six more out of the Noddle. He certainly doth hit the right that mingles profit with delight.”

That little observation with its pleasantly mixed savour of Herrick and of the common-sense 18th century, might serve as the motto of Mr. Bliss's volume. It were to be wished in the interests of profit and delight that books thus dealing with local history might be collected in the large centres. In the library of the State of Massachusetts “Quaint Nantucket” would assuredly occupy an honourable place. — “*Literature*,” *London Times*.

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Mr. Bliss has the true *flair* for the quaint, and knows how to distinguish it from the merely accidental. His "Quaint Nantucket," though written with a light pen and deft, and lighted up by a glint of humor here and there as befits the subject, is, in fact, the result of serious study, and must always contribute its share to the history of economics in early New England and of morals and manners in early times. The well-conceived volume contains extracts from ancient town records, from the Friend's Meeting, and journals of the sea-rovers who for two centuries made the fame of the Island of Nantucket. The selections are made with fine discrimination, and so ably woven together that the book is entirely unique, and may well serve as a model for students of our early history. Then men of earliest Nantucket were by no means models of godliness, nor the women either. But they had the charm of strong originality, of a robust personality, and this book makes them appear very real and very much alive. — *New York Evangelist*.



## “Quaint Nantucket”

A book pleasing to those who remember Nantucket as it was before electric lights made commercial that dear old town, is the story of its early life entitled “Quaint Nantucket.” In this book, where every chapter is interesting, none is more so than that relating to the birth and growth of Quakerism. Either there are fuller records in Nantucket, or Friends there had improved in severity on the methods of English brethren, for the laws of the meeting were so tyrannical that the reader wonders why it did not die sooner than it did. Members were disowned for permitting their children to marry “out of meeting,” for “keeping a violin to play upon,” and even for the way they dressed their hair. In spite of the Quaker influence, we find that Stephen Norton swore “one profane oath,” and “one profane curse;” and in accordance with its spirit, when the town desired to be protected against fires, the selectmen were instructed to buy ladders and buckets “as cheap as they can.” — *Springfield Republican*.

## *Various Opinions concerning*

Those who take up "Quaint Nantucket" with the idea that they are getting hold of a new guide-book will be disappointed. Mr. Bliss has taken his subject more seriously. His narrative covers a period of two hundred years, and it ends with the extinction of the whaling industry. It is a curious fact that whales began to play an active part in the affairs of Nantucket as far back as 1668, when the settlers made a bargain with Indians, concerning whales that drifted upon the shores. The shores of the island were marked out in sections and sachems were appointed to supervise the cutting up of stranded whales and to divide the shares. This led to disputes between claimants, and appeals were made to the island court which decreed: — "That no Rack Whale that come ashore in any sachims bounds shall be cut up until all the masters of the shares that belong to that whale do com together." . . .

Mr. Bliss has made an extremely interesting volume, which throws a most vivid light upon early Nantucket affairs. — *Boston Beacon*.

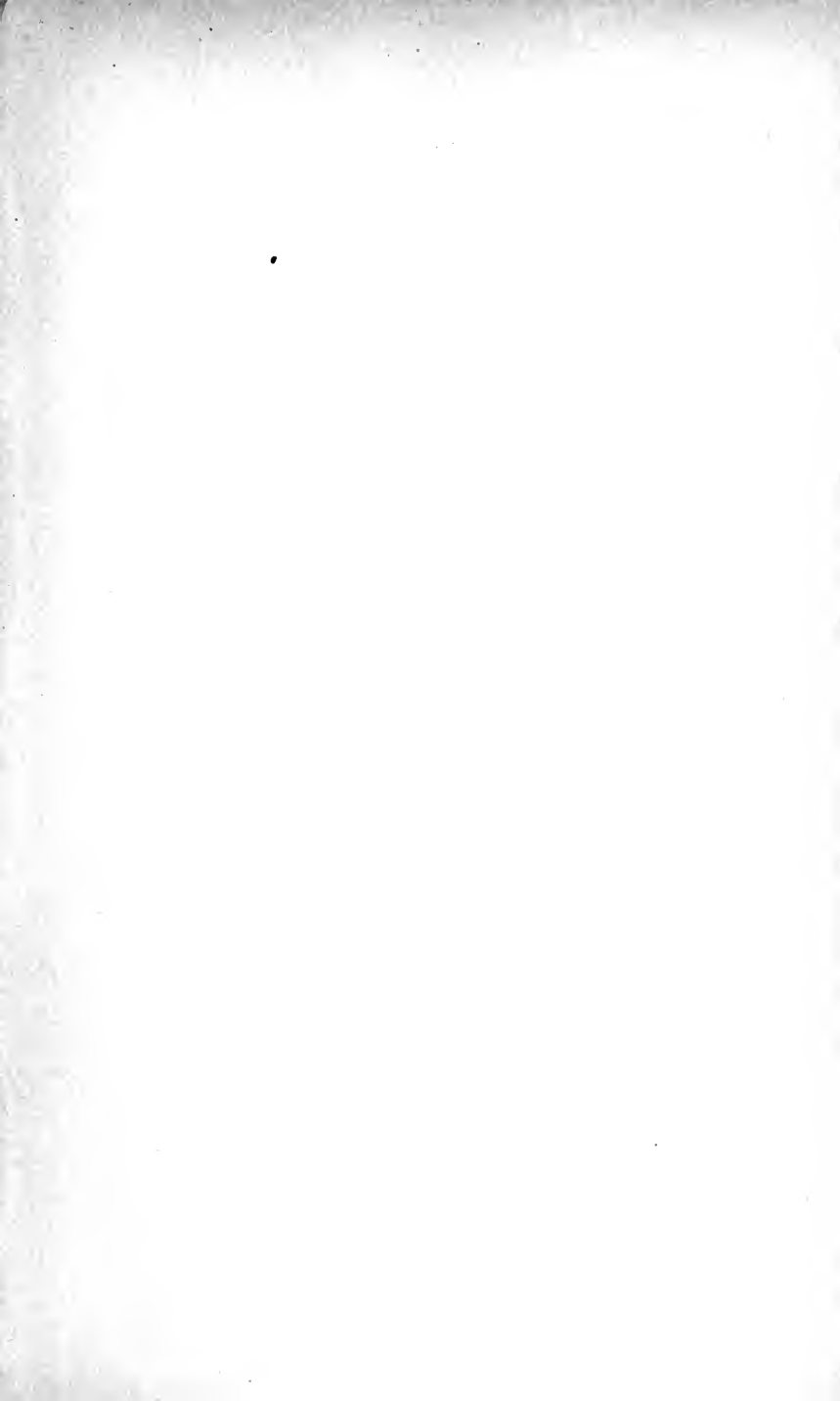
## “Quaint Nantucket”

“SAINTS PRESERVE US!” . . . The author of “Quaint Nantucket” says, “Quakerism was a power that suppressed the natural emotions, dulled ambition, destroyed manliness, and reduced the thoughts and actions of men to such a uniform level that one searches in vain for any individual greatness during the period of its dominion over Nantucket.” The Quakers may have presented a forbidding side which the author has seized upon, losing sight of their Christian sweetness. Verily, I can sympathize with that Nantucket lady, born among the Friends, who perusing the chapter, “The Dominion of the Quakers,” exclaimed: “I would like to buy a dozen of these books that I might throw them in the fire!” The author continues: “Those plain, square, shingle-sided, unpainted houses, whose cold and barren look tells of the nearness of the sea, are reminders of the Quakerism which ruled Nantucket for more than a hundred years.” Saints preserve us! That was a quaintness brought from the mother country. How otherwise could our respected friend have found so charming a title for his book. — E. V. Hallett; to *Nantucket Inquirer*.



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